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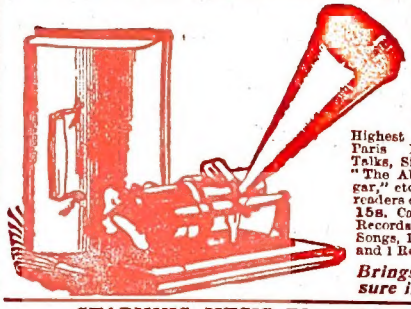

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SHORT STORIES

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Adventures of an Actress.

Inside the quadrangular erection was a couch, upon which lay the body of a woman.

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XIX.—THE TORTURED FACE.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

"A GREAT sensation has been caused in the circles of Society lately by the strange disappearance of the beautiful Mrs. Wingfield, wife of the famous R.A., Gilbert Wingfield. Mr. and Mrs. Wingfield were so well-known in London, and the devotion of the pair to each other, a fact so patent to all their friends, that great sympathy [illegible] aroused for the bereaved artist. We are unable to say any details of the mysterious occurrence before our readers as the affair is naturally kept as secret as possible. Mrs. Wingfield was a daughter of the famous Sir Hector Dawlish, the explorer. The matter is engaging the utmost attention of Scotland Yard, who have so far, however, been unable to throw any light upon the unfortunate lady's whereabouts."

"Now that has the makings of a very pretty little case," said Kempton Bond, and he threw down the *Daily Express*, from which newspaper he had culled the above item, and proceeded to light a pipe.

Kempton Bond was a detective who had attained to some degree of eminence in his profession, not by any of those meteoric achievements so dear to the heart of the writer of sensational detective fiction, but by sheer attention to detail, which he himself maintained was the only road to success in his dangerous calling.

It was a cold winter morning, and his simple little office in the Adelphi had a particularly cosy look. A bright fire burnt on the hearth, throwing a cheerful glow upon the plain red walls, hung with a few fine engravings.

For some time the detective sat motionless, merely exhaling huge clouds of tobacco smoke. Neither was he engaged in thinking out some abstruse problem in connection with his profession. It was Kempton Bond's way to let nothing come between him and his moments of relaxation, which were not, it must be confessed, ever of very long duration.

For perhaps ten minutes he smoked on in silence. Then there came a sudden knock at his door. He did not trouble to say 'come in,' for he knew perfectly well that the knock was merely the prelude of an entry, and only a matter of form.

A man glided into the room and said in a soft voice, "Sir Hector Dawlish to see you."

Bond jumped to his feet, and his listlessness vanished.

"Show Sir Hector up, Sefton," he said curtly.

The factotum retired. In another moment or so he reappeared, followed by a slim old gentleman of about medium height, with a soldierly carriage, and bronzed, weather-beaten, clean-shaven face.

Sefton glided out of the room and shut the door. Bond motioned his visitor to a chair with a silent gesture. It was always his custom to allow the first word to come from his clients.

The old gentleman sat down, then he said in precise high-bred tones: "I expect you know what I have come about, Mr. Bond?"

"The strange disappearance of Mrs. Wingfield, I presume," answered the detective quietly.

"Yes; and with your permission I will, without wasting time in further preliminaries, proceed to tell you all I know of the affair.

"My daughter was married to Mr. Wingfield about ten years ago. It was a love match, and I may as well tell you, contrary to my wishes, as I have always looked upon artists and actors with rather an indifferent eye. Mere prejudice, I know, but still there's the thing. However, the marriage, though childless, has, so far as I know, been a happy one. My son-in-law has always given me the idea of having been an exemplary husband, and I have never heard a breath of suspicion against him, though of course, as you know, I have been out of England a good deal. Still, my daughter's letters were always happy and reassuring. And now suddenly comes this bolt from the blue. My daughter has mysteriously disappeared, and left a note to say that she has gone off with another man, whose name is not divulged in the letter."

Sir Hector paused, and though he spoke firmly and concisely, Kempton Bond was far too good a judge of character not to observe that beneath the calm exterior lay all the anguish of a stricken father's heart. He looked keenly into his client's face, and then said slowly:

"But you do not believe yourself that that is the true fact of the matter? I take it that you feel that there is some other factor in the case, that you think there is some other explanation to account for Mrs. Wingfield's disappearance."

"I do, I do!" cried the old man, throwing his assumed cloak of punctiliousness to the winds. "I feel sure that my daughter would be incapable of so terrible a crime. She was my all, Mr. Bond, ever since her mother died, and it went to my heart to give her up, even though I knew I could not always keep her by me. And now, though everything points to her guilt, yet I cannot, I will not believe it, until I hear

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it from her own lips. There has been foul play somewhere, I know it. Sift this mystery to the dregs, Mr. Bond, and I will give you anything you like to ask of me that is in my power to give."

"If it is possible for human capability to do so, Sir Hector, I will. I would do my best to help you if only for my professional reputation," replied the detective.

"I will first of all see Mr. Wingfield. You see as the case stands I have really so very little to go upon. He might be able to give me useful information. I will then see you again, and report to you what I have discovered."

CHAPTER II.

The house occupied by Gilbert Wingfield was in Kensington, and had been, in the days when the fashionable London suburb was only a tiny village on the outskirts of the Metropolis, an old manor house, though it had been done up thoroughly by its present occupier, and presented but few characteristics, internally, at all events, to tell of its pristine self.

The artist was in his studio when Kempton Bond was announced, a splendid oak-pannelled chamber, with numerous canvases, finished and unfinished, round its mellow walls.

The artist received the detective with the chastened air of a man who has not yet recovered from the effects of a grievous sorrow. There were dark lines under his big black eyes. His mouth was disguised by a silky black moustache and pointed Vandyke beard. Undeniably a handsome man.

Kempton Bond did not waste much time in coming to the point. He briefly explained that Sir Hector had visited him that same morning, and had requested him to take steps to discover the whereabouts of the missing lady. To which Wingfield listened in silence, though when the detective had finished, he shook his head sadly, as though to say "all the detectives in the world won't give me back my lost wife."

"I take it you desire me to go on with the case, Mr. Wingfield?" Bond asked, almost sharply.

"Most certainly," answered the artist with alacrity "and if you can restore my wife to me or unearth the villain who has wrecked my domestic happiness—well, I am a rich man, and should be prepared to pay your price, whatever it is."

The detective was silent for a moment, then he said: "Who do you yourself suspect, Mr. Wingfield, as the villain who has run off with your wife? For surely there must be some one at whom you can point the finger of suspicion?"

"You are wrong, Mr. Bond," came the quick answer, "I most solemnly swear to you that there is no one upon whom I can fix suspicion. If you had known my wife you would understand my point exactly. There is no one whom I would sooner have sworn was more the soul of rectitude and honour than she."

"Perhaps you will show me the note that your wife wrote to you telling you that she had gone off with another man?" said the detective, going off upon another tack.

The artist went across to a corner of the studio, to where a fine old Sheraton bureau was placed. From a pigeon-hole he drew forth what turned out to be a piece of note-paper, upon which was written in an eminently feminine and refined hand the following words:

"My dear husband,—For dear you are, and dear you always have been in spite of all that will happen. When you get this I shall be far away. I have left home with one I love not wisely, but so well that I must sacrifice my honour, and, I fear, your happiness, to my passion. Do not try to find me. Try only to forget the woman who was once your loving Wife."

"Before passing my opinion," Bond said slowly, "I should be much obliged if you would let me see some more specimens of Mrs. Wingfield's handwriting. It need not be anything of a private nature, though I am sure that you will absolve me from any feeling of mere curiosity. But the case is one that is more perplexing than any I have yet been engaged upon, and I cannot afford to let any chance slip by that may help me in my investigations."

"I will give you a letter of my wife's," answered the artist without any hesitation, "I am convinced you only ask me to do so for perfectly adequate reasons," and after again rummaging a little in the bureau, he handed the detective a note, evidently in the same hand as the other.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to allow me to keep these two documents for the present?" said Bond. "They will, of course, be shown to no one but myself, in fact, I think that it would be best for the sake of safety that you write me a note confirming my retention of the letter that was left you by Mrs. Wingfield. I should then feel that I had your sanction to my course of action."

The artist elevated his eyebrows.

"Is that your usual custom, Mr. Bond?" he asked. "I am so utterly unused to detectives and their ways that you must pardon the question."

"Such is customary," came the imperturbable answer, "though of course—" but Wingfield put up his hand.

"You shall not find me wanting in manners, Mr. Bond," he cried, and sitting down at his desk, he wrote a short note, as desired.

A few moments later Bond took his leave for the present. Yet as he made his way out into the gloomy street he muttered to himself:

"Perhaps you mayn't be quite so calm next time we meet, Mr. Gilbert Wingfield. You're one of the coolest customers I've ever come across, but I may have a trump-card up my sleeve that will force you to throw down your hand."

CHAPTER III.

In accordance with the completion of the tour that had been arranged the *Good Samaritan Company* found itself at Bradford once more with a full cast, for Hazel Harlow and Eric Monteith, fresh from their week in London, had rejoined the company in accordance with their agreements.

The death of Hazel's dissolute father had made a great, change in her fortunes. For somehow or other the defunct farmer had managed to amass a considerable fortune. And so Hazel, despite all the cravings she had had, had come to the determination to retire from theatrical life after the completion of the present tour in three weeks' time.

What was responsible for this sudden reversion in her

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feelings? What influences could have been at work to make her so suddenly renounce the chances of becoming pre-eminent in the profession she had voluntarily adopted, and in which she had already secured so strong a foothold?

The answer was to be found in the one word Love. At last what she had longed for so ardently had come to pass. She was in love, and with a man worthy of her whole-hearted affection, who had proved his own unswerving loyalty and devotion to her in a thousand ways. And had he not risked his life for her more than once? At last Eric Monteith was to win his reward.

Yet though Hazel knew in her heart of hearts that at last Love had set his foot upon her destiny, she had not dared to voice her feelings to the world.

It was a raw, cold winter's afternoon, and already darkness had set in. Hazel and her friend and fellow-actress, Jenny Lovelace, were making their way along the gloomy streets towards their lodgings, when suddenly their attention was attracted by the faint sound as of someone weeping.

The wailing noise appeared to come from the ground. Both paused instinctively, and looked around, their sympathies awakened.

A little lad, wretchedly clad, was huddled up on the doorstep of a deserted house, weeping bitterly. Hazel stooped down, and said in a voice of infinite pity: "What's the matter, little boy? Why do you cry so?"

The mite stopped crying and looked up in the sweet face bending over him. Then he said in a voice still choked with weeping:

"Mother's ill. She sent me out for a doctor. And I'm so hungry," and again his tears broke out afresh.

Hazel and Jenny exchanged glances. Their eyes filled involuntarily at the sight of such grief in one so young. Then Hazel spoke again, spoke with all the spontaneity of her kind young heart:

"Will you take us to your mother, little boy?" she said. "Perhaps we can help her!" The little fellow, he was a pretty child despite his rags, sprang up at once. "I will take you to her," he said confidingly, "it's not far."

He conducted the two girls along the street, and then turned into one of far meaner aspect, to dive down a narrow court debouching from this thoroughfare.

It was quite dark up the alley, and the actresses drew closer together for mutual support. Suddenly a faint beam of light disclosed their little guide, who was holding a fragment of candle, stuck in an old bottle. He had mounted a rickety flight of stairs at the head of which he stood, before a half-open door.

The girls, swallowing the natural repugnance they felt at being in such unsavoury surroundings, mounted the crazy stair-way, and followed the child inside a narrow room.

In the corner of the squalid apartment was a bed, or an excuse for one, that seemed to be made chiefly of old sacks. Upon this miserable pallet was the body of a woman, whose face they could but dimly see in the gloomy light of the solitary dip.

"Archie," said the voice of the sick woman, "is that you? What a long time you've been, dearie."

The voice, though faint, was not a common one. Hazel advanced to the side of the pallet, and stooping, said in a low voice: "You are ill? We have come to help you."

With an effort, the sick woman, who had been lying with her face to the wall, turned round and gazed up into the beautiful young face, into the glorious blue eyes that were transfigured with the divine light of pity.

"Who are you?" she muttered hoarsely. "You have a sweet face, but you cannot help me. I'm dying."

Hazel caught her breath, "At least let me go for a doctor," she said.

"All the doctors in the world can't save me," came the answer, and Hazel thought she had never heard a human voice fraught with such agony. "I'm dying of consumption, and I shouldn't care if it wasn't for Archie." Then the voice changed. "Sweet lady, will you do a dying woman, who hasn't a single friend in the world, a last favour? It is much that I shall ask you, yet if you will promise to do what I ask you will at least have the satisfaction of knowing that you have eased the soul of a woman dying friendless and alone."

A wail from the little boy, who had crept to the foot of his mother's bed, brought Jenny to his side. She put her arms about him. The dying woman threw her a look of the deepest gratitude. Then she turned to Hazel.

"Bend down," she muttered. "There is much to say, and but little time to say it in. I was born for better things than this. My father was a well-to-do North Country merchant. I was a governess in London. There I met and fell in love with a man. We were married in secret according to his desire. Then Archie was born, and my husband left me. He had grown tired of me, and I, who loved him only too well, rather than live with a man who made no pretence of desiring to acknowledge me as his wife, left him, and returned home, to find my father dying of the same disease that is killing me, and a pauper.

"After his death I came to Bradford and found employment in a mill as a wool-carder. By dint of the most strenuous exertions I managed to make just enough to keep my boy and myself out of the Union. But the hard work and the unhealthy atmosphere of the factory soon began to tell on my lungs, with the result that God has sent you here to listen to a dying woman's confession. Under my pillow you will find my marriage certificate and the name of my husband. I don't know where he is now, but perhaps you will be able to find him. I shouldn't care for myself if he was never to hear of me again, but there is Archie. Perhaps he will do something for the little one."

Then she raised herself upon her arms, and called out in a loud voice: "Archie, darling, come to me!"

In a moment the little lad was on his knees beside the miserable bed, and the poor wasted arms of his mother were round him.

"Good-bye, little son," she murmured, "tell—your—father—" but the words were never finished. For Death had cut the sentence short.

Underneath the pillow of the dead woman were the papers she had mentioned. Hazel took these forth with reverent hand.

"I shall take these papers, Jenny," she said gently, "and give them to Eric. We had better fetch a policeman and tell him about this poor woman. As to the little boy, what shall we do with him?"

"Take him with us," cried Jenny spontaneously, speaking as her warm heart bade her, her eyes wet with tears.

"Yes," answered Hazel solemnly, no less moved than her comrade had been. "We will take him with us. For somehow I can't help looking upon him as a sacred trust."

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CHAPTER IV.

Kempton Bond sat in his cosy office at an open bureau. Before him lay three documents that he was studying intently.

"That was rather a cute dodge of mine," he muttered, "getting Wingfield to write out that acknowledgment of his wife's letter. I don't think he tumbled to the real reason that made me ask him for it, that it was because I wanted a specimen of his *natural* handwriting. I'm beginning to see daylight faintly. In the first place I believe that the surmise I pitched on first of all as being the only one likely to lead me anywhere is correct.

"From the conversation I had with Sir Hector, I take it his daughter would be the last person in the world to run off with a strange man. Why, from all accounts she was as devoted a wife as ever lived. And in spite of what you said, Mr. Gilbert Wingfield, that there is no one upon whom you can fix suspicion, I don't believe you, and that's flat.

"Now, is this last letter of Mrs. Wingfield's a forgery? At first I thought it was. But now that I come to compare it closely with this other one of hers, I'm bothered if I can make up my mind. If it is a forgery, well, there's only one man who can have been responsible for it, Wingfield himself. And against that, there's the argument that he has no reason that we know of for wishing his wife out of the way." The detective rose to his feet, and lighting a pipe, began pacing thoughtfully up and down the room.

"Confound it all!" he resumed, after a few moments silence. "It strikes me there's not so much daylight ahead after all. If the note is *not* a forgery, well then Gilbert Wingfield is a man who has been wronged, and there's no more to be said. If it is a forgery, then the arti must have some solid reason for wishing his wife out of the way, and I shall have to try some other tack to find out what's at the back of it, and we shall have to rout out the past history of the gentleman. If I were one of your pet detectives that can tell who a man's tailor is from the way his trousers are turned up, well, the thing would be as good as done, but I'm not Sherlock Holmes! Makes very good reading, but I should very much like to measure blades with him in real life."

At that moment Sefton entered with a letter. The missive bore the Bradford postmark. "I seem to know that hand-writing," said Bond, and tore open the flap.

There was a letter addressed to the detective, and one or two inclosures.

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He read the letter through carefully with kindling eyes.

"Well, here's something that licks creation," he said slowly, "Never tell me again that there's nothing in coincidences. I've had some surprises in my life, but I don't think I ever remember anything like this," he thrust the papers into his breast pocket and rang a bell.

In a moment Sefton appeared.

"I'm going round to Sir Hector Dawlish's," the detective said curtly, "I don't know when I shall be back."

Sir Hector was at home. He occupied chambers in Jermyn Street. "Well, Mr. Bond," he said eagerly, as the detective was ushered into his room, "have you any news for me?"

"I have indeed," came the grave answer, "and I want you to be prepared, Sir Hector, for intelligence of a very grave and startling nature."

The baronet caught his breath.

"I only beg that you will not keep me in suspense, Mr. Bond," he cried. "Believe me, I am prepared for anything."

"I will not attempt to beat about the bush," said Bond, "I must preface my news by telling you that your daughter has no right to the title of Gilbert Wingfield's wife. The artist had already a wife living when he married her."

Every vestige of colour fled from Sir Hector's face as he heard this terrible indictment against his son-in-law.

"Merciful Heaven!" he muttered brokenly, "how do you know that?"

"By means that are nothing less than miraculous. With your very kind attention I will read to you a letter that I have but just received from a friend of mine in Bradford, a Mr. Monteith, who is at present the member of a theatrical touring company, but who is a man of gentle birth, and whose testimony is absolutely unimpeachable."

"A letter! May I beg of you to read it to me at once?"

The letter from Eric was as follows:

"Dear Mr. Bond,—I expect you will be surprised to hear from me, and doubtless more so when you have perused this letter. My excuse for writing to you must be that you are the only man I know likely to be able to sift the matter to its dregs, while I am sure that if any man can repair a terrible wrong to those who have no means of doing so for themselves you are that man.

"Last evening, Miss Hazel Harlow, whose name will probably be familiar to you, and her friend, Miss Lovelace, were the chief actors in as sad a little drama of everyday life as can well be imagined. They were walking along the streets when a poor little lad accosted them and begged them to accompany him to the bedside of his mother, who was dying. This they did, to be just in time to witness the poor woman's death.

"Before she died, the poor woman, who had seen better days, intrusted into Miss Harlow's hands the papers that I inclose with this letter. This she did in the hopes that the father of her little boy might be found and induced to do something for the poor little orphan. I can tell you no more about the man than that his name is as is set forth on the marriage certificate: Gilbert Wingfield, the same name as that of the well-known R.A.—"

"And the same man," concluded the detective, handing, as he spoke, the tattered register, all that had been left to the poor dead woman to bind her to the past, to the astounded and horrified Sir Hector.

The baronet looked with almost lack-lustre eyes at the incriminating document that stated that a marriage had been duly solemnised between Gilbert Wingfield and Henrietta Lambert at the registry office in John Street, Clerkenwell.

"But how do you know it's—*he*?" asked Sir Hector in a low voice, "there's nothing here to say who he is."

In answer, Kempton Bond handed a faded piece of note-paper to the baronet.

"Because this was also under the dead woman's pillow," he answered quietly.

"This," was yet another letter, a love-letter that began, "My darling Hetty," and ended up "Your ever loving Gilbert," merely a few burning sentences between the beginning and end of the epistle, breathing undying love and affection, love that had brought the recipient to a terrible and unhallowed grave.

"His writing," muttered the stricken Sir Hector. "Oh, to think that such villainy exists. My daughter—my poor darling daughter—terribly sinned against, yet not, I'll swear, sinning. Where are you? Where are you?"

"Gilbert Wingfield is the only man who can tell us that," answered the detective gently. "I would have you be of good heart, Sir Hector. We are still groping for light, though of course this new discovery has put a powerful weapon in our hands to use against Wingfield. With your acquiescence I will go round to his house at once, and endeavour to wring the whole truth of the story from his lips."

CHAPTER V.

As on the first occasion when Kempton Bond had presented himself at the artist's house, Wingfield was in his studio alone.

The detective was at once struck with the haggard, almost wild look, on the artist's face. He had the appearance of a man who was suffering from the effect of intense mental strain.

He received the detective almost listlessly, and did not even trouble to rise from the chair in which he reclined in the studio. His dark eyes were supernaturally bright, with a far away look in them that Bond could not but notice.

"I have come to see you, Mr. Wingfield," began Bond incisively, "with a piece of news in my possession that has considerably modified the first impressions I had on embarking on this case. I have learnt something about your past life that makes me very uncertain how to proceed."

He paused to note the effects of his preamble. A faint colour came into the face of the other man. He assumed an upright posture in his chair and said, with an evident effort, "May I ask you to be slightly more explicit?"

"Very well," came the clear answer, "I have to tell you that I know of your first marriage with Miss Lambert, in Clerkenwell, on the 15th of February, 1889, and that your first wife was still alive when you married Miss Dawlish."

But if Bond had expected Wingfield to exhibit any feelings of fear on hearing this terrible indictment of his conduct, his anticipations were to receive a severe shock.

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The artist made no sound of any kind. He seemed to have relapsed into the state almost of torpor that he had been in on Bond's arrival. He merely sat motionless and gazed vacantly before him.

The detective, used to all manner of men as he was, had to admit to himself that at last he had chanced upon a being totally different to any one else he had seen in all his long experience.

Then, to his amazement, he discovered that Wingfield was talking gently to himself. It was indeed improbable that he had heard the last sentence addressed to him. The single question he had put to his visitor had evidently cost him an effort. He had put it and relapsed once more into the inner recesses of his own thoughts.

Bond leant forward. The artist was speaking so softly that it was all that he could do to hear what was being said. The words he did hear, however, were as follows:

"To have so nearly achieved success only to fail. Why won't my strength last? And it would have been such a masterpiece, a triumph before which the finest Wiertz or Hogarth would appear a tawdry daub. To be so near—to have fame—almost in my grasp, only to see the jade slip by me. For somehow I feel that I shall never do it now.

Suddenly the artist rose from his seat, and an expression came into his face of more terrible ferocity than any Bond ever remembered to have seen portrayed on human countenance. Like a panther he crept across the room towards a great canvas that was set in one corner of the studio, his eyes roving furtively from side to side, with vacant cunning. Instinctively the detective rose as well. In an instant the madman, for such he undoubtedly was, came to a dead halt. Then he swayed for a few moments like a drunken man, to fall heavily into Bond's arms, foaming at the lips with unmistakable frenzy.

The detective deposited the unconscious body upon a couch, and tore to the bell-pull, which he tugged with all his strength. The pealing summons brought more than one servant into the room in evident alarm.

"Take your master to his room," cried Bond authoritatively, "and run with all haste for a doctor. I'm afraid he's very ill."

The helpless body was carried out, and Bond found himself alone in the studio. With startling alacrity he locked the door, thus securing himself from intrusion.

Then he threw himself into a chair and gave himself up to the deepest thought.

"You're in deep water now, Kempton Bond," he said

In an instant the madman came to a dead halt. Then he swayed for a few moments like a drunken man.

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to himself, "and if you're not very careful you'll be out of your depth. 'A triumph before which the finest Wiertz or Hogarth would appear a tawdry daub.' Those were his words, and that's where I shall find the keystone to this dark business. He's mad, mad as a hatter. The question is, how long has he been insane. I was once in the Musee Wiertz, in Brussels, and I shall not easily forget the terrible pictures that are in that gallery. And Wiertz was mad, too"—barely had the thought flashed through his brain before he had leapt to his feet with a stifled exclamation.

"I think I'm beginning to see daylight now," he went on.

He sat down in the chair lately occupied by Wingfield, and tried to remember all the details of the brief scene that had led up to the crowning end of the short act.

"After he had spoken, what did he do?" continued the detective. "He rose to his feet and set off in the direction of that big canvas. He moved like a man with a purpose, too, as though he were making towards some fixed part of the room."

He hurried towards the great canvas, and pulled it aside, half-expecting to find a door concealed behind the obstruction. But he was doomed to disappointment. There was nothing there but the panelling that ran in like fashion all round the fine old chamber.

"Wait a bit. This room wasn't built yesterday. This house was old, long before you were born, Kempton. This oak panelling is two or three hundred years old. I've heard that this very house was an ancient country manor-house in days gone by. It's more than likely that there is a secret chamber here. If so, by Jove, there's your explanation of what the madman started off with: '*To have so nearly achieved success only to fail. And it would have been such a masterpiece!* Good Heavens! The very idea is enough to curdle your blood!" and with his quick brain working thus at express speed, the detective hastened to put his new-born theory to the test.

His keen eyes ran round the room. Then he advanced to the panelling and began tapping it sharply upon the surface that had been covered by the huge canvas. At one place the wood seemed to give out a distinctly hollow sound. His heart began to beat fiercely.

But the surface of the oak was smooth and devoid of any protuberances. The panelling was about seven feet high. Along the top of it ran a cornice, below which were plain wooden dentals.

He reached up and ran his fingers along the top of the cornice.

The dust lay thick upon the smooth surface of the wood. It was evident that he would derive no inspiration from that point.

His fingers strayed to the dentals. He felt each one in turn, starting with one a considerable distance from the place that had given out the hollow sound.

Ah, what was that? A loose one. He tugged at it. Yet though it seemed loose, it defied his utmost endeavours to remove it.

He reversed the action and pushed it upward. The result was electrifying in its unexpectedness.

A heavy rumbling sound, as of a big door swinging back upon rusty hinges, followed the effort.

The next moment, and the panel immediately to his right seemed to fall inward, and a rush of cold air came out into the warm studio.

Something remarkably like a groan fell from the detective's lips. The sound marked the realisation of all his worst forebodings.

For fully a minute he stood motionless, regarding almost vacantly the black cavity in the wall that led whither he dared not guess. Then, pulling himself together with an effort, he addressed himself anew to his self-imposed task.

"It's got to be gone through with now," he muttered, "cost what it will."

A flight of stairs led upwards from the black void. Bond put his hand in his pocket and produced a tiny electric glow-lamp, a thing he never allowed himself to be without.

He switched on the little light, and flashed the bright though diminutive beam into the cavity. The steps led upwards for some considerable distance, though exactly how far he was unable to determine.

He mounted the stairway with quick firm footsteps, to find his progress barred by a door that, to his chagrin, was locked.

But Kempton Bond was a man of ready resource, as, I venture to think, has already been sufficiently proved. He took a small steel instrument, bright and deadly looking, from some recess on his person, and applied the point of the jemmy, for such it was, to the quaint old lock.

A sound of splintering wood followed, for the timber was rotten with age. The next moment and the door flew open as though by magic.

He found himself in a long, low chamber, lighted from above by a kind of skylight. The room was furnished in Eastern style, with sumptuous Kabyle mats upon the floor, and hangings of rare Persian fabric on the walls.

In one corner was an easel, draped with a cloth. Behind the cloth could be seen the protruding corner of a large canvas.

Bond tore back the concealing drapery from the easel and a cry of horror fell from his lips, as the canvas beneath stood open to his gaze.

It was only the portrait of a woman, life-sized, and unfinished, though what there was was enough to explain the reason for the detective's exclamation. Never had he seen a human face so limned, never would he have believed it possible that any artist could have set down in paint so ghastly a presentment of human agony.

The face was bloodless. The scarlet lips, fearfully vivid by reason of the pallor displayed upon the rest of the countenance, were slightly parted. The eyes were wide open, and it was here that the painter had achieved his most terrible success. With dreadful fixed glare they stared out from the dead canvas like living animate organs. No words can express the horrible ghastliness of those tortured eyes.

Kempton Bond threw back the cloth over the painting with a shudder. A faint groan fell on his ears. The sound acted upon him like a strong tonic. "Thank Heaven," he murmured. "I'm in time after all."

He wheeled swiftly round. In the corner opposite the veiled canvas was an erection that he had cursorily noticed on first entering the room, and that closer inspection proved to be the facsimile of a small Arab tent, quite in keeping with the other appurtenances of the chamber.

It was held up at its four corners by elaborately gilded

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poles, round which were draped hangings richly embroidered in gold and silver filigree.

The detective, without a moment's hesitation, flung back the costly hangings. Inside the quadrangular erection was a couch, upon which lay the body of a woman, whom Bond recognised in an instant as the poor tortured model of the portrait.

This, then, was the explanation of the terrible mystery.

CHAPTER VI.

The conclusion of the affair is best told in Bond's own words in a letter to Monteith.

"The full explanation of the ghastly business is as follows: Gilbert Wingfield was, and had been a maniac for a considerable number of years. His mother had died in a madhouse, and the germs of the hereditary disease had lain latent in his brain for a long time, to finally blaze out with unrestrained fury.

"More than once it has been proved by the confession of the poor woman who was not his wife, though he had married her, that he was possessed of hypnotic powers. He at last conceived the terrible idea of painting a portrait that should embody in every detail the true presentment of human suffering. With this end in view he determined to procure a model who should really suffer the agonies he wished to portray.

"He therefore hypnotised his wife and got her to write the letter that announced that she had gone off with another man—this explains what I was sure of, namely, that her hand and no other had penned the note in question—and conveyed her away to the secret chamber, the existence of which, incredible though it may seem, was only known to himself.

"But his horrible devices did not stop there. Having thus thrown dust into the eyes of those likely to discover his maniacal plan, he proceeded to experiment upon the unhappy woman with all sorts of drugs, and thus got the model for the terrible portrait that I found.

"He is now under restraint. Miss Dawlish, as she may now be called, is with her father, who is going to take her abroad, for as you can well imagine, the shock to her nerves and constitution generally has been terrible.

"As regards the little Archie, provision will be made for him from Wingfield's estate. That is the one bright spot in the terrible affair—leaving out Miss Harlow's crowning act of mercy—that the child will at least be provided for. And from all accounts, a thing indeed to be thankful for, the little fellow seems to be untainted by his father's terrible malady. He is to be trained for the Navy.

"You can use your own discretion about telling Miss Harlow the true facts of the sad story. My advice to you is—don't, or at least wait until after you are married.

"And, by-the-by, when is that happy event coming off? Mind you don't forget to send me an invitation to the wedding.—Ever yours sincerely.

"Kempton Bond."

Eric read through the letter with the keenest attention. When he came to the end of it the colour rushed to his face.

He laid down the missive and gazed thoughtfully out into the murky street.

"We leave Bradford to-morrow," he soliloquised, and in two week's time the tour will be at an end. "Dare I take advantage of the augury contained in Bond's letter? Heaven knows my love for Hazel has never waned, though I have said nothing more about it to her since that day when she told me that although she had regard for me, she had not the love I wanted.

"It's three o'clock now. I'm sure to find Hazel at her lodgings. She won't be out on such an afternoon as this," he gazed out upon the street, along which a driving drizzle of sleet was sweeping.

Then he rose to his feet with an air of sudden determination. In a few more minutes he was hurrying along the wet pavement.

A faint blush rose to Hazel's face as Eric was announced.

Jenny, with that rare tact that some women possess intuitively, rose from her chair and slipped noiselessly from the room before Eric had had time to enter.

The young man entered the room, and his face displayed the pleasure he felt at finding the girl he loved alone.

For a few moments they talked desultorily about the trivialities of the moment. Then suddenly Eric leant forward in his chair.

"Hazel," he said earnestly, "in another fortnight our tour will be over, what are you going to do then?"

Hazel did not answer for a moment. Then she looked up into her lover's face.

"Mr. Venables has made me a very flattering offer to continue with him," she said, trying to speak calmly, "but I am undecided whether to accept."

"Then what do you say to letting me decide for you?" broke in the young man eagerly. "Won't you entertain an offer from me?"

"From you?"

"Yes, Hazel. The offer of going on tour with me for life? I've waited so long for you, darling, will you marry me, Hazel?"

He read his answer in her shining eyes. The next moment he was on his knees beside her chair. His arms were round her. Their lips met. Love had beaten down all obstacles.

A faint cough caused Eric to spring to his feet. The next moment Jenny stood in the room before the plighted lovers.

"You'll ask me to the wedding, Eric?" she said demurely. "Oh, you lucky, lucky man. If ever any one ought to be congratulated, you're he."

Eric's brain was in a whirl. He could hardly realise that what he had longed for so ardently, for so many weary months, had really come true.

"Ask you to the wedding? I should think so," he said soberly. "But you must get Hazel to tell you when that will be."

Hazel's troubles seemed nearly over now. But the series of catastrophes that had dogged her footsteps for so long were not quite over. She had forgotten that she had still one enemy who would never forget or forgive her for having thwarted his base desires, a man who put himself beyond the pale of society by his fierce attempts to entrap her. She was still to be reminded of the existence of Horace Caldecott.

The *Good Samaritan* Company next week is at Norwich, where Hazel and Eric Monteith are able to be of assistance to Jenny Lovelace.

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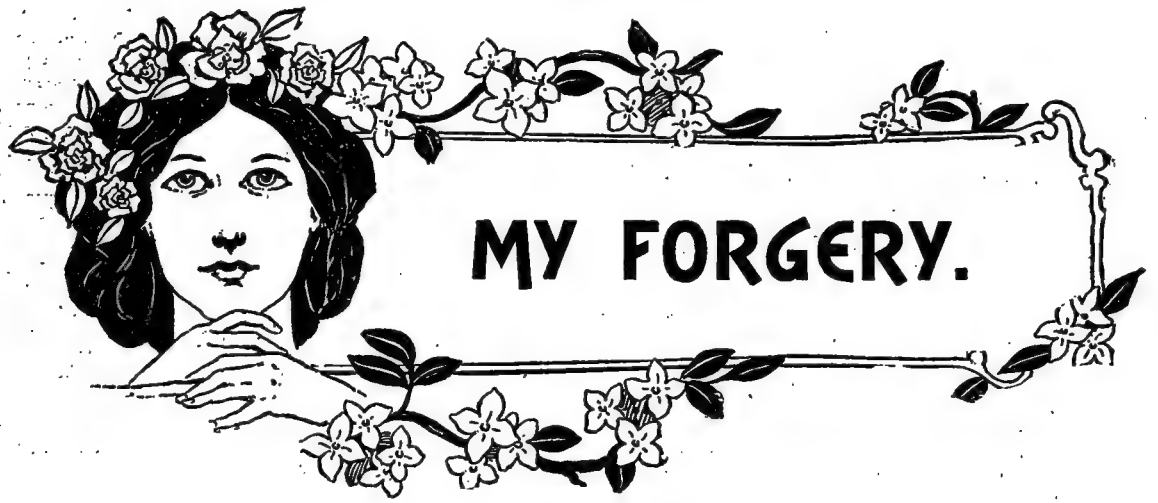

MY FORGERY.

WHEN, at the close of the year 1876, I returned from Texas, having succeeded in losing two of the five thousand pounds which had come to me at my father's death as my share of his personal property, I felt some doubt as to how I should dispose of myself, my time and my talents. Of the latter I had become a little bit distrustful of late, for they certainly had not served me well, when brought face to face with the exigencies of agricultural life in the far West; and I resolved that I would think twice or thrice before committing myself to another venture. As a matter of fact I thought a great many times, but my thinking did not come to much, for I had been idle for six months, when one day in the coffee room of an hotel in one of the large towns in the north of England, which I will call Longborough, I came across my father's old friend Francis Merrick, the accountant of the well-known firm of Langton, Merrick, Gibbs, and Stuart.

"You don't mean to say that it is you, Mr. Richard?" said he, when I held out my hand to him, "you are the very last man I expected to see, for I thought you were thousands of miles away. Did you get tired of the American farm?"

"Yes, I did," I answered, "or else the American farm got tired of me. I know I lost as much money as I thought I could afford to lose at once; so I came home, thinking I might as well lose my next thousand in England."

"A very sensible idea. I suppose you have begun already. What are you doing now?"

"Oh, I am very discreet now. I am not losing money, only spending it."

"Ah, living a lazy life? Very nice thing for the time; I shouldn't mind a couple of months of it myself, but it doesn't pay in the long run. What are you going to do now—something, I suppose?"

"I should be glad enough to do anything; but what is there I can do?"

"Well, you can do a great many things; the question is, what will you do? Just now, for instance, I could give you plenty of work in the office in helping us with the winding-up of two large estates we have got in hand, and the experience you had some years ago at Wellbridge would make it fairly easy to you; but of course you wouldn't come. If you will, I'll give you £200 a year willingly."

"Done," I replied; "it is a bargain; when shall I come?"

"You don't mean it?" said Merrick incredulously.

"Indeed, I do. I was never more serious in my life."

"Very well, then, come on Monday," said he, and I assured him that I would, and that he might expect to see me at nine o'clock.

Our compact had hardly been made when he was called away, and as soon as my own business was concluded I went home, and much surprised my wife by telling her what I had done. She was not only surprised, but a little hostile, for she evidently considered the clerkship decidedly beneath her; but I laughed so persistently at her scruples, that she soon became really, or apparently resigned.

At half-past eight o'clock on Monday morning I got into a train at the little roadside station near the suburban villa, which was our temporary home, and before nine I was at the office of Langton, Merrick, Gibbs, and Stuart. Merrick was there, and he welcomed me with his usual jolly laugh. It was, he said, before his usual time, but he had come down early to see whether I would put in an appearance, though he confessed that he had not expected me. I was taken to a private room, and a junior clerk brought in several baskets appallingly full of papers. Merrick explained to me part of what was needed to be done; and the experience to which he had referred, which had been gained in connection with a small estate of my father's, helped me the rest. The business was a long and somewhat complicated one, but in about a fortnight I had got through it. I then took in hand a similar piece of work, and performed my second task much more quickly. As I put into Merrick's hand the final statement, I asked him what I was to do next.

"This is all the business of this kind," he said, "that we have in hand just now; but I will tell you something that I have been thinking about for the last two or three days. You know that since poor old Marshall, our cashier, died so suddenly six months ago, Mr.

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Stuart has been keeping the cash; but he is anxious to give it up, and we have been looking out for a cashier. Now, if you will take the post it is there for you, and you will have £300 a year to begin with. What do you say?"

I told him I could say nothing then, but that if he would leave the matter open for twenty-four hours I would consider it, talk it over with my wife, and let him know my decision in the morning. On the morrow I informed Merrick that I accepted the offer; and I was at once installed in a room downstairs, with a door and a window opening into the general office, and a private door leading into the corridor. I was not long in getting into the routine of the work, nor was I long in making some discoveries of unsuspected complications in the inner life of the firm. It had originally been founded by Mr. Langton, and my friend Merrick, after serving his apprenticeship, had become his partner.

Mr. Langton's health had more or less failed while he was comparatively a young man, and a paralytic stroke at last put a stop to all his business activities, and as the business was then growing beyond Mr. Merrick's control it was determined to take in as additional partners Mr. Langton's nephew, John Gibbs, and the senior clerk, David Stuart, whose long acquaintance with the affairs of the clients of the firm was really as valuable as the capital which might fairly have been expected from an incoming partner.

Mr. Gibbs, who considered himself the representative of the altogether incapacitated Mr. Langton, had become dissatisfied with the results of the partnership, the offer of which he had, in the first instance, hailed as an extraordinary piece of luck. He considered that the measure of influence he exerted and the amount of profit he drew, were altogether incommensurate with his deserts; and that if Mr. Merrick, who, so far as the outside world was concerned, was really the firm, could somehow be removed out of the way, he would then gain the position to which he was entitled. He had taken Mr. Stuart into his confidence, and infected him with his views, and it did not require much astuteness to see that instead of Mr. Merrick's partners being real allies, they were traitors in the camp. Even from me, a comparative stranger and outsider, they took very insufficient pains to conceal their feelings; and I soon became convinced that if at any time they had an opportunity of inflicting a blow upon him personally, without injuring the firm, he would certainly not be spared.

It is, as we know, the unexpected that always happens, and when the opportunity came, it came in a way upon which the conspirators, as I may call them, could not have calculated. Apart from his connection with the firm, Mr. Merrick's business habits and legal knowledge had rendered him much sought after by the directors of joint-stock undertakings, and there were several large companies in Longborough for which he performed secretarial duties. On inquiring for him at the office one morning, about seven months after my acceptance of the post of cashier, I was told that he had gone to a meeting of directors, and that he would not be back for two hours. My usual luncheon-time came, and I was just running down the steps which led from the door of the corridor in which our offices were situated to the street, when a cab, which had been driven very quickly, suddenly stopped, and Mr. Merrick put his head out of the window.

"I am glad I have caught you here," he said, "for I have not a moment to lose. A telegram has come which makes it necessary that I should start for Brussels by the next train, and I have not had time to countersign these cheques." Here he pushed two cheque-books into my hand. "They have been signed by two of the directors; but of course they must have my signature as well. I can't possibly sign them now; so you must go to the bank and get Mr. Grey to accept the signature of the firm, and then Mr. Gibbs or Mr. Stuart will sign them for you."

"But suppose Mr. Grey won't consent?" I inquired; for I knew that if anything went wrong the company might lose its credit, and Merrick his reputation for ever.

"Oh, tell him he must," said Mr. Merrick, whose principal failing was a habit of making sure that things would go right; "tell him he must, and there is no doubt that he will."

"Well, but if he won't, how am I let to you know? What will be your address for the next three days?"

"I can't tell you, but I will wire to-morrow. Tell Mr. Gibbs I shall certainly not be later than Tuesday, and that I hope to be back on Saturday. It will be all right, you'll see. Good-bye." And the cab drove off, leaving me standing on the pavement with feelings that were decidedly the reverse of comfortable.

I determined that before going to luncheon I would call at the bank, see Mr. Grey, the manager, and set my mind at rest. I was fortunate in catching him, and still more fortunate in finding him in an accommodating frame of mind. I stated my business and waited for his reply with an anxiety which I tried not to show.

"Well, Mr. Radford," he said, tickling his upper lip with the feather of his quill pen, as his habit was, "of course it is not strictly business-like—a little irregular, you know—but still, I should like to oblige Mr. Merrick, and, in short, you may tell Mr. Gibbs or Mr. Stuart that the signature of the firm will be honoured, and it will be all right."

Mr. Grey's words brought my bad quarter of an hour to an abrupt end. A great weight was removed from my mind; that being gone, Richard was himself again, and I ate a hearty luncheon, feeling perfectly at ease. My worry, as I thought, was over; little did I imagine that in a more aggravated form it was yet before me. I went back to the office, and for about a couple of hours was engaged upon some work which I was bound to finish that afternoon. I then took the cheque-books to Mr. Gibbs, told him the circumstances, and said I should be glad if he or Mr. Stuart would sign the cheques either at once or during the morrow, as I should have to begin paying them out early on the morning of Wednesday, which was the following day.

Instead of at once consenting, he said he would not take the cheque books then, but would think over the matter, and would speak to me in the morning. This struck me at the time as rather an odd proceeding, but nothing more. I must have been very stupid, for in spite of all that I knew I frankly confess that not until I lay down on my sofa to enjoy my after-dinner pipe, did it really occur to me that he was contemplating a refusal. The idea, once conceived, was too horribly reasonable to be got rid of, and I spent a wakeful and a wretched night. In the morning my worst fears were realised. When I saw Mr. Gibbs he said he had been thinking the matter over, and had come to the conclusion that it would not be advisable to give the

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signature of the firm. I reasoned, expostulated, and put before him in the strongest words the probable consequences, both to Mr. Merrick and the company, of his unreasonable refusal; but the long-waited-for chance had come, and he was not going to let it slip. At last I said:

"Well, if you won't do it, Mr. Stuart will; I shall ask him."

"Ask him by all means," he said, coolly turning to his newspaper, "but it will be of no use. I have been talking to him about it, and he quite agrees with me. He won't sign, you'll see."

It was now impossible not to perceive that it was a concerted plot, and hope nearly died within me; but I was not going to leave Merrick to the mercy of these Philistines without making a fight for him. I turned on my heel without a word, and walked into Mr. Stuart's office.

It was, as Mr. Gibbs had predicted, of no use. Mr. Stuart refused to sign, and declined to give any reason for his refusal. I was now nonplussed, but I would not quite abandon hope. A telegram from Mr. Merrick might come any moment, and then I could wire to him for instruction in this unexpected crisis. Eleven struck, then twelve, then one; and I dared not wait any longer. I felt I must now act upon my own responsibility; so I locked up my books, put on my hat, and hurried to the bank to lay the matter before Mr. Grey. I told him the story and he listened quietly.

After I had finished he was silent for some time, and did nothing but tickle his lip in a more than usually irritating manner. At last he said:

"It is very awkward indeed. I can't advise you at all; I am perfectly helpless in the matter. Of course the cheques must be countersigned—you know that as well as I do; and if the firm won't sign, we must have the signature of F. W. W. Merrick."

I thought that he put the thing in rather curious language, and when I met his eye he was regarding me with what I may call an expressionless expression, as if he had purposely emptied his face of all meaning, and were laying it before me as a problem to be solved.

"What did you say?" I inquired, simply to give myself time to think.

"I said," he answered, speaking more slowly and decisively than before, "that those cheques must have the signature of F. W. W. Merrick."

"But," said I, "Mr. Merrick is in Belgium."

"Of course he is, and that is the difficulty," said Mr. Grey, now regarding me with an odd look which seemed to inquire, "Is this fellow who professes himself to be a friend of Merrick, a fool or a coward?" I hope I am not quite either; and by a sudden flash of intuition I saw the nature of the suggestion which had been so ingeniously made for me. I sprang to my feet, and exclaimed:

"All right, Mr. Grey; thank you very much; it will be managed no doubt. Good day."

"You are quite welcome," said he; "but after all I have told you nothing that you didn't know before. You see we must have a signature of someone."

As our hands met, our eyes met also, and there was no doubt that we understood one another.

I went back to the office in an unusual state of excitement, but I got through my work as usual, and did not leave for home until the regular time. I took with me the two cheque books and about half-a-dozen letters and other documents, on each of which appeared the signature which Mr. Grey had told me so emphatically he must have—the signature of F. W. W. Merrick.

I rather alarmed my wife by eating and drinking half my usual quantity; but I had business before me which required that both head and hands should be up to the mark, and I was not going to run the risk of putting them out of order. Dinner concluded, I went upstairs to my little library, lighted my pipe, opened and placed on the table one of the letters from the packet, and after studying the signature for some time to familiarise myself with its lines and curves—with what art critics call "the spirit of handling"—I took from a drawer a sheet of foolscap, which I began laboriously to cover with the best imitations I could manage to produce.

The signature was by no means an ordinary one, for it had a number of eccentric and apparently purposeless flourishes, and at first it seemed rather chance work. There would be a few unmistakably poor and wooden attempts, then a fairly free and good one, and so on. Gradually, however, the number of failures began to decrease; at last almost every one I produced was all I could desire, and after working steadily for about two hours, I decided my preparation was complete.

I then opened one of the cheque books with the name of my absent friend and employer. There were about a hundred and seventy of them in all, and the total amount represented was over twenty thousand pounds. It was after midnight when I joined my wife, who had been waiting for me in the drawing-room, wondering what had kept me so long. I told her that I had been doing some office work which I was bound to have ready for the morning; and after taking a couple of glasses of whisky to steady my nerves, and insure my having a good night's rest, went off to bed with perfectly easy mind.

I did not feel so easy the next morning when, about half-an-hour after my arrival at the office, the earliest of the company's creditors presented himself and asked for his money. The conviction that I had possibly ruined myself in endeavouring to save Mr. Merrick forced itself upon me, and I felt strongly tempted to throw the cheque books into the fire, but I had gone too far; I had crossed the rubicon, and I might just as well burn my boats at once. The utterly commonplace and unsuspicious manner in which creditor number one examined his cheque, folded it up, and placed it in his pocket-book helped to set me at ease. Number two disturbed me less, and with number three I felt quite comfortable. Still my nerves were on the stretch, for I knew many of the cheques would be presented that day, and I could not help feeling terribly eager to know how they would be received at the bank.

I turned rather sick two or three times when the recipients seemed to examine their cheques rather curiously; and at last came a horrible moment. About one o'clock my door opened, rather hastily it seemed to me, and a man entered to whom I had given a cheque for a hundred and seventy pounds and a few odd shillings only half-an-hour before. He held the cheque in his hand, and I thought, "it has come at last, they have refused to cash it," my heart almost stopped, but I managed to say, with an appearance of coolness:

"Well, Mr. Judson, what can I do for you now?"

"I have come about this cheque," he said, but I knew that only too well.

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"What about the cheque?" I asked, "it's all right, isn't it?"

"Well, it's right, and it isn't right," he replied. "It seems that my partner, Mr. Wills, has a private account against the company for forty-three pounds ten, and Mr. Merrick promised it should be included in this settlement; but this is only the amount of the regular monthly bill."

"If that is all," said I, "tell Mr. Wills to set his mind at rest"—words cannot tell how grateful I was to Mr. Judson for having set my mind at rest—"there is a cheque for him here. The accounts were really separate, and they have been kept separate to avoid confusion. He can have it now if he will come for it."

This little scare upset me for the afternoon, but I had no similar shock. The cheques were paid out, and as I heard nothing of them I took it for granted that they had been honoured. Many had been called for, many had been sent away, and when Monday morning came I had fewer than a dozen left, and they were only for small amounts. I was involved in some perplexing calculations when I heard someone enter, and looking up, I saw Mr. Merrick.

"Here I am," said he, in his usual free and easy manner; "how are you, and how have you got on?"

"I am pretty well," I replied, "and I have got on better than I might; but I have had a queer time of it."

"Queer time of it?" he asked. "Queer, in what way?"

I looked him full in the face and said—

"Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Stuart refused to sign the cheques of the Longborough Metal Company."

"Refused to sign!" he exclaimed, with a countenance from which all colour had fled; "what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," I returned; "but we had better go into your office, and I will tell you all about it."

I took the cheque books with me, and said:

"Don't be uneasy, I have managed everything. All has been paid but several trifling matters, as you will see."

He opened the cheque books, stared at the counterfoils, stared still harder at the few cheques still remaining and then asked excitedly,

"What's this? This is my signature, sure enough, but I never wrote it."

"Of course you didn't," I said, "*I* wrote it. I wrote a hundred and seventy-three of them."

"But it's forgery," he said.

"Just so," I replied.

"And the punishment for forgery is penal servitude."

"Exactly; but no one can proceed against me but you, and I don't think you will."

"I should think not. By Jove, Richard, you've saved me from those scoundrels. I shall never forget this to the last day of my life. I don't know what might have happened if those cheques had not been ready. But what made you think of it?"

I told him the story as it has been told here, and he immediately suggested that Mr. Grey must be seen at once. I assented, and in a few minutes we found ourselves in Mr. Grey's office, face to face with the manager and his everlasting lip-tickling quill.

Merrick began, "We have come, Mr. Grey—" when he was interrupted by Mr. Grey himself, who put up his hands and said,

"What does it matter why you have come? I don't want to hear. I would rather not hear; and, as a matter of fact, I won't hear. I think you had better go without trying to tell me anything. It is much the wisest thing to do, I assure you."

Merrick was taken aback at this reception; but I was only amused, and said.

"Mr. Grey is right, depend upon it. There are things it is of no use talking about, and we may as well go."

It was indeed, Hobson's choice, so we left the manager to himself and to his titillating quill, and adjourned to a neighbouring hotel, where, over luncheon, the story was told again with greater fulness of detail. Merrick thanked me again and again for what I had done, and in the excess of his gratitude made me an offer which was particularly tempting to me as I was then situated, but which I did not think it right to accept until it was repeated in a calmer mood a few days afterwards. The result of my acceptance was to bring us into very unreserved relationship with each other; but, though we became more intimate than it is the lot of most business friends to be, there was one subject on which we could never be induced to talk, and away from which he always turned the conversation when it seemed to be leading in that direction. Need I say that the forbidden theme was my forgery?

J. H.

WHAT SORT OF A GIRL ARE YOU?

It is always interesting to know other people's opinion of yourself, especially when that opinion is absolutely unbiassed.

If you want to know what sort of a person you are, If you want to know

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WHETHER YOU ARE INDUSTRIOUS OR LAZY,
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WHETHER YOU ARE COLD OR LOVABLE,
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THE CHARMED DAGGER.

I was not surprised when my doctor told me that I needed a change of air—a few weeks spent in some quiet place where I might rest up from my large law practice. I was feeling fagged out, and when an invitation came from an old college friend of mine to visit him in a remote village I lost no time in availing myself of it. It had been many years since I had seen Kennon Deering, but I found him just the same good, warm-hearted fellow I had known in college. He had never married, and the greater part of his life had been spent in travel; in fact, his foot had trod almost every portion of the earth's surface.

Several days after my arrival, while chatting over our cigars and coffee, he asked suddenly if I was an admirer of curios. Now, if I have a hobby, it is curio collecting, and I hastened to inform him of the fact. Immediately he conducted me to what he called his museum.

He possessed a most interesting collection, and what impressed me most was the unusual number of daggers. One in particular attracted my attention, and on the impulse I removed it from its sheath. The blade was about six inches long, but of the most curious colouring. Somehow there seemed a strong fascination about this little weapon. A thrill seemed to run through my whole body as my fingers closed over the handle, and then the sensation changed to a feeling that was horrible. I was suddenly possessed of a desire to bury the flame-shaped blade in my heart, and in a moment I would have done so had not my host grasped my wrist with such force that the dagger fell from my fingers.

"And now to explain," he said, as I sank giddily upon the nearest chair. "The weapon is one with a history, simple, yet terrible. Each man who has ever possessed one has sooner or later taken his own life or the life of another. It has been in my possession some months, and this is the first time it has been handled."

"For Heaven's sake, destroy it!" I gasped.

"No," he replied; "I prize it as a curiosity too much for that. It is over a thousand years old, and, so far as I am concerned, there is no danger. I know the secret of resistance."

* * * * *

A year went by, and I had heard from Deering but once, by a letter in which he had stated that he was off for a foreign country. One morning, to my surprise, a letter came, in which he said that he had married lately, and both he and his wife wished me to pay them a visit in their new home near Liverpool. To this I wired my acceptance.

The home that my friend now occupied was truly a small-sized palace. Everything that money could buy adorned it. Books, paintings, statuary, costly furniture, rich tapestries, all that heart could desire was there. Mrs. Deering was the most beautiful woman I believe I have ever seen, and as charming in manner as she was handsome. So far as I could see their match was all that could be desired, and the days passed pleasantly in their society. One day, at dinner, Mrs. Deering turned to her husband with the remark that Frank Chesely had written and said he would visit them for a week or so. Deering made no comment on the news, but that it was anything but pleasant to him I could plainly see.

In due time Chesely arrived, and from the moment I laid eyes on his dark, sneering countenance I knew we would never be friends. The feeling of dislike, I am sure, was mutual, and it was not many days before I noticed that my friend had changed from one of the merriest, most talkative of men to one moody and preoccupied. This struck me more forcibly when we were in Chesely's company, and I wondered at it.

One morning Deering and myself were in the smoking-room, one door of which led out on to a little side porch. I had stretched my legs comfortably over a chair and was half-asleep, when suddenly the sound of voices startled me from my doze. It was Mrs. Deering and Chesely.

I looked at Kennon. He was breathing heavily, fast asleep. It is needless for me to repeat the conversation between the woman who was this man's wife and the man who was a guest in his home. Suffice it to say that the relationship between the two was not mere friendship.

At dinner that night Kennon Deering was in high spirits. He laughed, he joked, his wit was sparkling and keen. His melancholia had vanished, and, to my utter amazement, he was more than gracious to Chesely.

The latter was surprised at this sudden turn of affairs, I easily noticed, and Mrs. Deering herself glanced questioningly at her husband more than once. During the meal my host turned to Chesely with the remark that, as soon as dinner was over, he would like to show him his museum, as he understood he was fond of curios.

In a short time we had finished our cigars and Deering led the way to his treasure box.

Something in Deering's manner struck me as being unnatural, and as his cordiality increased towards his false friend the latter's uneasiness became more apparent. However, in spite of this fact he seemed astonished and interested in the sight before him, and when my host pointed out his unique assortment of daggers he seemed to appreciate the great feature of the collection to even a greater extent than I had. But the knowledge of the influence that one among that number exerted caused me to shudder.

"By the way, Val," suddenly remarked Deering, "let me show you my latest acquisition, a suit of Persian armour."

I followed him to the other side of the room, leaving Chesely reading the descriptions under each specimen, and was examining the new curiosity when a muttered oath, the first words of which caused me to turn and stand rooted with horror, told too plainly the meaning of it all.

We saw Chesely standing there, saw his hand raised, saw something glitter, and Frank Chesely lay on the floor still and dead. I rushed to his side.

In the wound I recognised the flame-shaped weapon. It was the accursed dagger I had handled with such strange results.

I looked up and met the eyes of Deering. In that glance my worst suspicions were confirmed. His sleep had only been feigned. And this visit to the museum—was it chance?

T. L. D.

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We have in our possession a considerable number of photographs of men, women, and children of all grades of society secured for us by our agents, who have scoured the United Kingdom for this special purpose.

Each week we publish five of these portraits, and to each of the persons thus represented we dispatch the sum of £5, on his or her forwarding a claim on a post-card addressed to PORTRAIT DEPARTMENT, "SHORT STORIES," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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Is your portrait here? If so, drop us a post-card, and get £5.

All claims in connection with the portraits below must reach the address already given above by Tuesday next, December 17th.

Full names and addresses of the correct claimants will appear in succeeding numbers.

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Simply write on a post-card these words:

The Portrait No..... (here put number of portrait) in the current number of SHORT STORIES is mine. Please forward a £5 note.

(Name and full address.)

Persons represented must claim for themselves. Claims made by other people on their behalf will be ignored.

No. 56

No. 57.

No. 58.

No. 59.

No 60.

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THE FERGUSSON FEUD.

A Tragedy of Errors.

CHAPTER I.

THE ADVERTISEMENT IN *The Times*.

"SHOULD this meet the eye of Charles James Fergusson, supposed to have resided, from 1887 to 1898, somewhere in the State of Pennsylvania, U.S., and since the latter year to have lived for some time in the neighbourhood of St. Heliers, Jersey, he is earnestly requested to communicate at once with the undersigned—

"MESSRS. DEANE AND FROBISHER
"(Solicitors),
"184, Bedford Row,
"London, W.C."

The man who read this announcement in *The Times*, of February 4th, of this present year of grace, would not at first sight seem to have been one who could possibly have had any interest in, or connection with, the matters referred to therein.

The place was a certain Free Library in the south-east district. The assembled frequenters of the reading-room were none too clean or respectable, so that the individual in the last stage of shabbiness almost, was in no way conspicuous or noticeable.

He was apparently between thirty and forty in actual years, but his unkempt overgrowth of iron-grey hair and beard, his sunken cheeks, and general air of physical decadence, stamped him at once as being unnaturally and prematurely old.

The advertisement in question irresistibly attracted him; he could not get away from it.

"I never was in America," he muttered under his breath. "While as for Jersey, I know no more about it than what I've heard and read."

He tried his pockets (or the apology for them) but failed to find that for which he sought.

"If I had a piece of paper now," he said to himself again, "I'd copy it."

A second search proved as futile as the first, resulting only in a dirty scrap, absolutely useless for the purpose.

"Well, at any rate, the address of the lawyers is easy to remember—'Deane and Frobisher, Bedford Row.' The names seem familiar, but I can't make out in what way."

It was getting towards dusk, and Charles James Fergusson left the Library, and slouched out into the wet streets. As he shuffled along westward, he communed with himself.

"It's too late to do anything to-day; besides, I must prepare myself to answer questions. Say to-morrow afternoon. It will be a ticklish thing to tackle Messrs. Deane and Frobisher in this garb, and state. The clerks mayn't let me get near the principals. Still, I won't give in to the first knock under."

In the course of an hour and a half he was outside the St. James' Restaurant in Piccadilly. He had barely stood there five minutes when a hansom drove up. Out of it stepped a gentleman in evening dress.

The newcomer appeared to have some difficulty in finding silver enough for the fare. Gold he had—a handful—and the sight of it made the eyes of the wet and ragged object watching by the kerb dilate with envious longing, and his lips crack and parch with the thought even of all that gold would buy.

Evidently of an impatient and irritable temperament, the gentleman at last suddenly handed up to the driver half-a-sovereign, telling him to keep the change, and walked into the restaurant.

Charles James Fergusson was, in his way, a bit of a fatalist, and at the same time a grumbler where his own bad luck was concerned.

The two states of mind are somewhat inconsistent, but in this particular instance, inconsistency was regarded much in the light of a virtue, and cherished accordingly.

The tramp certainly envied the gentleman; that was only natural; but he also tried to believe that, out of sheer pity for his misery, Fate had in immediate store for him that which would in all likelihood put them, tramp and gentleman, on a common footing.

Then something happened.

Casting his eyes on the ground, Charles James saw lying on the wet pavement an oblong piece of white pasteboard—a visiting card.

The gentleman must have dropped it when seeking for silver. Picking it up, and taking it to a street lamp, he read upon it a name, which startled him not a little, inasmuch *as it was his own.*

"CHARLES JAMES FERGUSSON.
206, Belgrave Road, S.W."

The address was not his, but the name—there was no mistake about that.

"I've an idea. I'll take a walk in that direction and wait for my double. There is no knowing what might come of it."

Time was when shabby Charles James was a wearer of evening-dress suits, and a good customer at the Cafe Royal, and at Frascati's. Time was when, left a more than moderate fortune by his father—a West-end curio dealer in a large way of business, he lived in purple and fine linen for such time as the money lasted.

In an evil day, however, he took to the turf, and reckless betting, and as that way ruin lies, he but fulfilled the good-natured prophecy of those who stood by and watched his career, and "came a cropper." He had not the energy to rise again, but drifted lower and lower, till he eventually touched bottom.

"Perhaps, if I work it right, this swell will help me. If I could but make myself presentable why, I'd have no difficulty with the 'devil's own!' I'm sure I've heard their names before. Frobisher!—Frobisher!—that's it! I know now! There used to be a sharp, nip-featured little man, precise as an old maid, come to see me—years ago—at old Mumble's school at Chiswick. He'd ask me questions; if I'd been a good boy, but never a word about my parents. At the time I thought that odd; but I remember that when I told the governor, he bid me be civil to old Frobisher. You may depend there's something in it! and Charlie Fergusson is going to be a rich man—a man of dollars—a millionaire!"

In his excitement he shouted out at the top of his

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voice, and the constable on point duty in Grosvenor Place eyed him suspiciously.

Half-past ten by the lodge clock at Hyde Park Corner.

"I don't suppose this reflection of me—this fine Mr. Fergusson—will get home over early, so I can take it easy. But I mustn't hang about, or I shall be run in for 'loitering with intent.'"

It was just eleven when he slowly passed the door of 206, Belgrave Road. At one period a semi-fashionable street, it is now the residential haunt of the well-to-do bachelor civil-servant, and leisured man.

Contriving to keep his eye on the house, the while affecting not to "loaf" in a way that would attract unwelcome official attention, the wastrel thought himself fortunate when, at a few minutes past midnight, a cab drove up to 206, his Piccadilly namesake descending from it.

Curiously, he had the same difficulty as before in finding silver. This gave our expectant friend his opportunity, for, crossing the road, he stood in the shadow of the cab waiting events.

"Hullo! What do *you* want?"

The hungry-looking, impossible individual said nothing in reply, but cooly surveyed his questioner with a shrewdly criticising glance that left not even the smallest personal detail out of its calculation.

Charles James Fergusson, briefless barrister-at-law, and sometime special foreign correspondent of the *Daily Scarifier*, was rather amused than otherwise at this other eccentric being's peculiar conduct.

"If," said he, "you are hard-up and want something, why don't you say so? Here! here's a couple of shillings for you. No, by Jove! there isn't, it's only one. I've no more silver. Good-night!"

He took out his key-chain, and turned to ascend the steps of the house.

"Half-a-minute! Mr.—er—Fergusson," said the poor Charles James.

"Eh! How do you know my name?"

"You shouldn't drop your cards about. It isn't surprising, you know, if one gentleman picks up a card that another gentleman has dropped, that the name of gentleman number two should become known to gentleman number one."

"Ah! you are a humorist, I see. Well, come inside, and—and talk. I don't feel up to laughing in the street."

The policeman on his beat quickened his steps as he saw the shabby, slouching figure pass up the steps in the wake of the opera-hatted, dress-coated gentleman. He deemed it to be a case for investigation.

As he came abreast of the portico he flashed his bull's-eye on the incongruous pair.

"All right, sir! D'you want me?"

"Oh, no, policeman; this is—is a friend of mine coming in for an hour's chat."

"Oh, indeed, sir! beg pardon! Good night, sir."

"Good-night, constable."

The policeman was only half-convinced; but, knowing the gentleman at 206, thought it must be all right, even if it did look a bit queer.

"He didn't like your friend's looks," said the visitor, with a half-smile and a smothered chuckle, as they entered the front dining-room, and, seating himself without invitation in the most comfortable chair he could find.

"No," returned his host, turning the gas in the chandelier up full. "You can't quite blame him, though, can you?"

This stalwart young fellow—he looked to be about three or four-and-thirty—stood nearly six feet, and seemed born to pass uninterrupted and good-naturedly through life, along the primrose way. His guest was manifestly of this opinion, for he found himself being almost irresistibly attracted towards this fortunate possessor of his own name.

The rich man, first feeding the poor man, turned him, as it were, inside out in true lawyer-like style, strangely refraining, however, from inquiring his name. Perhaps he thought the name of a man like his visitor, was immaterial and unimportant.

"Who's that?"

"Who's who?"

"Who's that the portrait of—there, over the mantel, who is it?"

"I don't know how the picture can possibly interest you; but, since you ask, it is—or was—my father."

The other walked deliberately across to where it hung, and, after looking at it attentively for a minute or two, gave vent to a long, low whistle.

"If that's your father," he said, "then *your* grand father must also have been mine, for he is as like as a twin to the man that called me son."

"What is your name?"

"Charles James Fergusson, of that ilk."

"I believe you to be a liar! and that until you read my name on my card, you never so much as heard the name."

"That's unkind! to call a man a liar just because he claims to be himself. If it comes to that, I'm inclined to think that *you* are the impostor, and that you've no more right to my name than has a South Sea Islander!"

"You are an impudent rascal," angrily replied the other. "But——"

He suddenly stopped short, and turning pale to ghastliness, dropped inertly into the nearest chair, his head falling forward on his breast.

Charles James, the social pariah, the outsider, was no heartless vagabond. The helpless condition of his companion touched and roused him. In a flash he took in the situation—more especially the dangers of it—to himself personally.

He gently lifted up the stricken man's head, but there was no intelligence, no speculation in the glassy eyes. A stertorous catching for breath; a gurgling like to the death-rattle in the throat, and in less than three minutes from his seizure Charles James Fergusson, of the Middle Temple, barrister-at-law, lay back in a huddled heap in his chair—dead—stone dead.

To say that the other was altogether collected and uninfluenced by the awful suddenness of the catastrophe, would be to say that which is untrue. To get safely away from the house without being observed, was, however, his first thought when he saw that all was over.

Then he looked hurriedly about him, and, for the first time, noticed, lying upon the big bureau, standing open in the corner by the window, a bulky letter, foolscap-size, ready for posting.

Casting one half-terrified glance at the dead man, he moved over to the desk and lifted the letter. As he did so, his brain conceived the idea that the packet contained information which, if he acted upon it, would give him a fortune.

Slipping the letter into his pocket, and stealing softly across the room again, he listened intently on the threshold, but heard nothing to alarm him.

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In another second he had reached the street-door—opened it—closed it again, and was in the street.

Not a soul was in sight; and as Big Ben boomed out the quarter past one, he halted under a lamp, and read the superscription on the envelope.

It was addressed to—

"Messrs. Deane and Frobisher
(solicitors),

"184, Bedford Row, W.C."

CHAPTER II.

The Story of the Feud.

In the smoke-room at Fergusson Peel, sits the master, ill at ease.

The old Border stronghold, dating back from Will Armstrong's time, and even before, has been altered, or rather added to out of all recognition. The old tower, or "peel," still stands in all its ancient ruggedness, but the comparatively modern house is entirely apart from it.

Fergusson is situate in the Scottish borderland, midway between Jedburgh and Hawick—classic ground, every inch of it. The ghosts of the old cattle-raiders are vulgarly supposed to haunt the district, and the huge rusty knocker on the ruinous iron-studded oak door of the keep, is popularly credited with being subject to a midnightly tattoo by the uneasy spirit of Outlaw Will on stormy nights in winter-time.

Two months have wholly changed the outward man of Charles James. He, to all appearance, is not the same person who, but nine weeks ago, stood under a gas-lamp at one o'clock in the morning, in the Belgrave Road, London, deciphering the name and address upon the letter he had only just before abstracted from under a dead man's sightless eyes.

The clean-shaven face and closely-cropped hair; the suit of well-fitting grey clothes, had transformed him. His own mother, were she alive, would not have recognised him.

And yet he is mind-disturbed and restless.

He has satisfied the lawyers, and the law; has entered into peaceful possession of lands and money, which have laid dormant and unclaimed for over fifty years, yet is there a fly in the ointment—a something he knows not what—that spoils his enjoyment, and makes against satisfaction.

Before him on the table is the identical paper which, two months ago, he carried off from the house in Belgrave Road. Its contents certainly enabled him to establish his claim, as, without it, he would have been completely at sea on almost every vital point.

One thing, however, troubles him, if anything more than any other, viz.—that nothing has ever been publicly made known of the Belgrave Road tragedy. The newspapers were silent; there was no record or account of an inquest; and when, a month after the event, inquiries were made on his behalf at 206, the house was found to be empty and to let; no one knowing anything of the late tenants. There was nothing, therefore, to be done, save to accept things as they were, and to make the best of them.

He was now, for the fifth or sixth time, acquainting himself with the contents of the stolen letter, which consisted of several pages of closely-written manuscript.

Briefly epitomised, the story was this:

On the eve of the defeat of Charles I. at Naseby in 1645, two brothers, sons of Sir James Fergusson, an ardent loyalist, quarrelled over the daughter of a certain Puritan preacher—one Caleb Hare. The elder, Charles James, had known the girl longer than had his brother Henry, although Sir James was equally resolved that neither of his sons should marry her.

Charles James, the first-born, was in command of a troop of horse in Sir Marmaduke Langdale's regiment, and though he was at home for a few days, was summoned to rejoin the army at almost a moment's notice. Henry was more of a student than a soldier, and it is to be feared, took advantage of his brother's enforced absence to press his own suit with pretty Naomi Hare. To do this effectually, he found it necessary to so far dissemble with his sweetheart's father as to consent to join the Roundheads under Fairfax. The old minister's objections vanished entirely when Henry assumed steel skull-cap and broad-sword on behalf of the Parliament, and a marriage, all unknown to Sir James, took place early one morning in the pastor's little house on the banks of the Coquet in County Northumberland.

It was a servant of the Fergusson Peel household that carried the news to Charles James at dawn on the day of the fatal fight. The infuriated young man swore, on the cross hilt of his sword, never to cease from the pursuit of vengeance till that vengeance was satisfied. Hot upon the information as to the marriage came the word that Henry Fergusson had joined the ranks of the Parliament men, and would be opposed in arms to his brother in the ensuing struggle.

All through the day did the elder seek the younger. Once he saw him through the dust and press of battle, but the opportunity passed, and Charles Fergusson was saved the guilt of deliberate fratricide. Then came the final rout, and with Cromwell and his Ironsides at their heels, the King's men fled the field, and, as it proved, the cause. Charles James escaped and, though he went through unnumbered vicissitudes, managed to reach a safe hiding-place. On the Restoration he came into his own, his father having died soon after the execution of the King; but the bitter feud between the brothers was, if anything, intensified by time. He married late in life, but it was a loveless match, one child, a son, alone surviving. Named Charles James according to family tradition, the boy in course of time succeeded to the family honours and estate. Henry's eldest son subsequently joining William Penn in his great American colonising scheme.

And so it went on, generation after generation, the two branches keeping up the feud out of sheer family pride. At last, in or about the year 1845 the two sons, and only children of the then representatives of the Fergusson family, went out into the world, and were never more heard of. Inquiries were made in every direction, but without result, and until the present year, when the firm of solicitors, Deane and Frobisher, unexpectedly discovered a clue to the missing heir.

The paper went on to give some particulars as to the barrister Charles James Fergusson's eleven years sojourn in Philadelphia, as special correspondent of the London *Daily Scarifier*. He had been "called," but had never practised, sailing for the United States almost as soon as his fees were paid. The short stay in Jersey was also touched upon, bringing the account to a close.

To put it broadly, the conscience of the man in possession was troubling him. He knew that he had gained his ends by fraudulent masquerading, and that, though the man he was virtually personating was dead, he held his present position solely by criminally false means.

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To get away from himself he determined to return to London, and the amusements and distractions of the metropolis to seek to exorcise the fiends of remorse and self-reproach.

Town was full to the brim, and everywhere was crush and clink and glitter. As yet, he knew nobody, nobody, that is, of any social importance, and was, therefore, thrown entirely upon his own resources. He was, however, successful in getting elected to a fairly good club, through the good offices of young Deane, the son of the senior partner of the Bedford Row firm. This gave him something to do, and an object in life of a sort, and brought him one or two acquaintanceships, which promised to develop into friendly intimacies.

A Major Galbraith, Seaforth Highlanders, retired, held the first place in his esteem, to all appearance the good feeling being mutual. The Major was a grizzled veteran—a widower with three daughters, the elder of whom was a charming girl of twenty-three, or thereabouts. Fergusson was introduced to her by her father at Epsom, the acquaintance very soon becoming, for him, the one thing for which to live.

Up the river to Henley in a steam launch, and down by road to Richmond, only fed the fire, until he could hold back no longer, but opened his whole heart to her.

"I know," he said, "that I am far too old for you, dear; but if you could look over that, I would devote my life to you—would do all that a man may do for your happiness."

"Mr. Fergusson," she said, "I am not sure that that which you deem to be an obstacle, is one in my eyes—is really so."

"Then I may hope?" he asked, in a tone that betrayed how much her answer meant to him.

"I think you may," she replied, looking down, and threading and unthreading her fingers.

After that it might have been thought that he would imbibe a brighter spirit; would regard the future with a certain amount of sanguine anticipation.

As a matter of fact, it was the reverse with him.

She had told him in an outburst of womanly confidence that it was because he was a good man that she was going to marry him; while he knew in his heart-of-hearts that he was a liar! a thief! an utter and shameless impostor!

So it was, therefore, that her avowal gave him no real comfort, brought him no peace.

One day it chanced that he made an appointment to meet Hilda Galbraith at Charing Cross Station, and to go with her to inspect a house some thirty miles down the line, in Kent.

While waiting outside the booking-office, the sudden rush of porters and ticket-examiners, and the increase of noise and bustle, announced the arrival of the Continental train.

He had turned to watch the arriving crowd, when the face, thin and drawn with illness, of a man, who was supported on either hand by a hospital nurse and a man-servant, and who was slowly coming towards Hilda and himself, made his blood almost cease coursing through his veins.

It was a pale face; the face of a man who had but lately passed within hailing distance of the "dark valley."

Casting one half-terrified glance at the dead man, he moved over to the desk and lifted the letter.

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It was the face of that other Charles James Fergusson—the man whom he had seen die in the house in Belgrave Road.

CHAPTER III.

Face to Face.

"And you do not mean to prosecute this man?"

"No; I do *not* mean to prosecute him."

"Then you will pardon my saying, Mr. Fergusson, that I, both as a lawyer, and as a man, consider you to be altogether wrong in not doing so."

"I daresay; and I suppose, as a matter of strict law and justice, that I ought to make my supplanter pay roundly for his certainly impudent assumption of my rights and privileges; but—I don't intend doing anything of the kind."

Old Mr. Deane shrugged his shoulders, and expressed, by the uplifting of his hands, and the turning down of his mouth corners, that he quite disclaimed all responsibility in the matter, and regarded his client as lacking even the commonest of common sense.

But he was to be even more astonished.

"Not only," declared Mr. Fergusson, "will I not punish this man, but I purpose leaving him in quiet possession of that which, though crookedly, he undoubtedly cleverly acquired. I have good reason to believe that he was, and is, absolutely unaware of his real connection with my family as a lineal descendant of old Henry Fergusson, who won Naomi Hare by a trick, and by going over to the Parliament side."

"If," interrupted Mr. Deane, "this be so, why the fellow is your cousin, and next in succession to yourself."

"Precisely! and as I have gear in plenty—through my mother—while this poor beggar, who evidently believed me dead when he appropriated that letter, if I turned him out, would practically be on the world again, without a shilling, and without a place to lay his head. Why, I'll just let him stay where he is."

"Then all I can say is, that you are a fine fellow! if you are a fool to yourself."

"Thanks! Perhaps you are right as to my being a fool, but it takes a wise man, you know, to make one; while even a fool may be so only in appearance. Mr. Deane, I have a request to make of you."

"Shall be only too happy to oblige you."

"Well, then, I want to manage this business myself, and in my own way. I don't wish my cousin to get an advance inkling of my intentions."

"Very good! very good! Not a word shall reach him from this office, you may depend."

"Then that's all right; and I leave London to-night for Fergusson, to which place I understand my relative has suddenly retreated."

Early the following morning a stranger alighted at Jedburgh Station, and forthwith engaged a trap to take him to Fergusson Peel. He had no luggage beyond a small Gladstone bag, and was accompanied by a manservant, who attended upon his master with the most devoted solicitude.

The distance being about fourteen Scotch miles, it was past midday when the "Peel" was reached.

"Mr. Fergusson, is he at home?"

"Yes, sir; your name?"

"My name? Oh, James—Mr. James, of London."

"Robert," said the visitor to his companion, when the servant had gone to inform her master. "You will come with me as far, that is, as the room door. I will manage then, and you will wait for me in the hall."

"Mr. Fergusson does not know your name, sir, but he will see you."

Robert took his master's arm, and helped him along to the door of the smoke-room, and left him there. The visitor turned the handle of the door, and entered the room.

The man who stood before him, in all the self-abasement of detected guilt, trembled so that the intervening table, upon which his hands leant, visibly shook.

"Mr. Fergusson," said barrister Charles James, in much the same genial, hearty tone as he had used that February morning in the dining-room in Belgrave Road, "they say that dead men tell no tales. Now I am here to deny that, and refute the theory entirely, for I have a tale to tell, which will be the best possible evidence against the truth of the proverb."

The other Charles James could not speak. He was fascinated by this man returned, as it seemed to him, from the dead. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. It frightened him; and he took it as being the just reward of his wrong-doing. Then he learnt how, on that night, the man he deemed dead was but in a trance-like fit, from which he emerged, in a few hours, to a serious illness of several months' duration. Through it all his memory was a blank, and he recollected nothing prior to the sudden heart-seizure.

He told his dazed listener how that he had been alone in the world ever since the age of twelve years, and, until he came across some papers of his late father's on his return to England from Jersey, was in complete ignorance of his own connection with the Fergusson's of the Peel. As soon as he could be moved he went, accompanied by a nurse and his man, to the South of France, from where he had returned four days previously.

"And this is not all," he continued, smiling; "I have found, through a sure channel, that you are the direct and, indeed, only living descendant of Henry Fergusson, who was the main cause of the feud, which has come down to almost recent times. You and I, therefore, ought, in order that the old tradition may be duly observed, to fight out the vendetta to the bitter end. What say you?"

"I don't understand! You say nothing of what I have done; but now that you are here I will go, and leave you to your inheritance."

"I don't fancy you will, when I say that I am myself about to leave again for the Pyrenees, never, so say my doctors, to return more. The best thing, therefore, you can do, is to stay where you are, and to drink my health every Halloween night with a brimmer, and three times three."

"But I don't deserve this!"

"Do we, any of us, get all that we deserve? I know I don't. Robert!"

His man opened the door and came into the room.

"Give me your arm to the trap. Good-bye, name sake! I shall always remember you as a fellow of infinite jest. Good-bye!"

He reached out his hand across the table; the other took and wrung it, till the sick man's face became whiter, and his fingers tingled again. It was the sound of wheels upon the gravel drive that told the one that the other had gone out of his life for ever, and that with his going had gone too—also for ever—the spirit of the family feud.

* * * * * *

Charles James has never told his wife the story; and Hilda Fergusson lives to-day in the happy belief that her husband is at once the noblest, the best, and the dearest of men.

Ralph Enderby.

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DEAD TO THE WORLD.

By Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXII. *(continued.)*

MEANTIME, Rossiter was pacing the little room in the east wing used as an office by Morgan Chandler, who was seated in a swivel arm-chair at a roll-top desk.

"The head better to-day, Mr. Chandler?"

"It's healing," growled the steward, pressing his hand very tenderly on the bandages he still wore, "but the pain's far from gone, the pain never will be gone till I bring them as did it to justice."

"The mystery is how they entered. The Squire's window was fastened and intact."

"Yes," said Chandler, "it seems to me they must have got in by the far end window in the corridor."

"The lights were switched off when you entered the Squire's room?"

"Yes."

"You're sure Branscombe was one of the men you saw?"

"Certain sure."

"Certain sure? And yet, you know, it was very dark."

The other paused in some confusion. "'Twere he, right enough," he said.

"And the other?"

"I'm not so sure."

"But you've let fall vague hints that you knew the man."

"Rossiter," said the other, wheeling suddenly round, "I'm not my own master here now, somebody else is master."

The detective nodded, and Chandler went on:

"I've got enemies here, enemies who've got the ear of the man who's master now and who'll lose no chance of paying off old scores."

"I can understand that."

"Now, can I talk to you certain sure that what I say will go to neither them nor him?"

"Man to man, what you tell me I'll tell to neither man nor woman."

"Well, then, there's one man employed on this estate, and in the confidence of the master, who owes me a grudge; a man who before he was an under keeper and night watcher was a well-known poacher, loafer, and brawler, a man whose work nowadays is to lie low by day and be abroad by night."

"I know the man you mean," said the detective, "Ned Fletcher," and with a pencil he scribbled a stenographic sign on his shirt cuff. After a few moments' silence he suddenly asked:

"What was your quarrel with Branscombe about?"

"Who told you there was a quarrel?"

And the detective, surer now of his ground, said: "Never mind, I know there was one."

Morgan Chandler was dealing with a detective who might, or might not, be in possession of the facts.

"A man in my position," he said cautiously, "nearly always has disputes of some kind with tenants and dealers."

"Oh, I know all that," said the detective, feeling his ground, "rows about accounts," and he knew from the other's shifty eyes that the shot had gone right home, the shot suggested by what he had learnt of the other's nature.

"Who told you?" he exclaimed hotly.

"Never mind. But it was a bit of a relief to you, Chandler, when he disappeared, wasn't it?"

"I'm not going to be cross-questioned like this, as if I was a thief instead of him," exclaimed the other angrily, "and, look here, Mr. Detective, I wish you good-bye! There's the door."

"Yes, there's the door," said the detective, opening it as he spoke, "but as to good-bye, suppose we say *au revoir?*"

And he left the steward's office, left Fallowfield Hall, remarking confidentially to himself: "Tom Rossiter, have you mistaken your vocation, oughtn't you to be scaring crows in a field or perforating stamps with a punching machine in a Government office, or on some other soft job requiring the brains of a rabbit? Chandler's lying about Branscombe, and lying because he himself's a thief; he's faking the estate accounts. But what was he doing in the Squire's room? Why didn't he touch any one of the bells? Ring up any one of the servants by just pressing a button? I wonder was he there—because he'd been cooking accounts? Is he lying about Fletcher, too? Who brought that strange letter to my place? Who sent that telegram on the day of the inquest? By Jove! what I thought was a split in the camp seems a deep move to put me on the wrong scent."

Looking up, he saw coming in an opposite direction the man who brought the telegram!

The man whom Morgan Chandler accused.

"Many a random shot goes home," he reasoned swiftly, "I'll ask the man who delivered the telegram if he knows anything about the letter."

By this time they had met. Fletcher was touching his cap; the detective wheeled round in answer to the "Morning, sir."

"Stop, Fletcher, you silly chap! Why didn't you wait for an answer to the letter you brought me?"

"I wasn't told to, sir," the man blurted out.

"Why, he said he told you to wait."

"What, the Squire, sir. He told me to shove it under the door and come away and say nowt about it."

"Oh! of course, of course, I was thinking of another letter that came earlier in the day. I beg your pardon, Fletcher, good morning."

And he walked along hastily, almost at a racing speed, to work off the pent up excitement with which his very frame vibrated.

"The Squire—the Squire! What's it mean—what's it mean?" he muttered. "Oh, you've been wide—wide—wide; you've been played with, fooled, Tom Rossiter. You're a disgrace to the Yard; you must never show your face back there till you've undone the tangle you've been making for yourself. By Jove! Tom, I think you're picking up one of the ends, you're picking up——"

"Hullo, Mr. Rossiter, any luck?"

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It was Bingle, the local constable, and he was in a sarcastic mood, and Bingle's moods were always defined; they were not merely engraved, they were dug.

"Surprised you sharp London chaps ain't done something to open our eyes down here, bein' chaw-bacons" (the term had been passed on by some 'good-natured friend').

"Patience, patience, Mr. Bingle, that's what we have to practice in our profession."

"Yes, we've been patient enough, sir; as them two genelmen brothers, Mr. James and Mr. Joseph Nubbley, was a sayin', 'patience is a virtue, and it's one as is werry useful in the police force.'"

"Pity the brothers Nubbley haven't got business of their own to mind instead of poking into other people's," snapped out the detective, and Mr. Bingle, who had been partaking of the hospitality of the square faced bottle, the joint possession of the brothers Nubbley, remarked with dignity:

"The brothers Nubbley is genelmen, Mr Rossiter, real genelmen, hindependent; not folks as gives theirselves airs, if they do come from London. Between you and me, Mr. Rossiter, as to their pokin' their noses into the business as brought you from London, if they couldn't have done no more, they couldn't have done much less, for all you comes from Scotland Yard."

"Why, you hob-nailed village pump washer! You public-house loafer! Go home and sleep off the drink that people treat you to to hoodwink you!" shouted the now angry Rossiter.

And the other, pulling himself up erect as possible, which wasn't very, said:

"All right, Mr. Rossiter, it's Hollands for the chaw-bacons guarding the village pump, but it's choice old port for the Criminal Vessi—vesti—"

No, he couldn't master it. He stalked away, hiccoughing "'partment" with all the dignity and directness of motion at his command, or what there was of it. And Rossiter, looking straight in front of him along the road, noticed the brothers Nubbley as usual basking in the sun in the little garden fronting their little cottage, James leaning on the mossy stone wall, Joseph reclining in his invalid chair, each puffing at his long churchwarden, and the detective reflected not only on the beautiful simplicity and calm of the picture, but also on the circumstance that the brothers Nubbley, in conversation with his rural colleague, had passed remarks.

Rapt in these reflections, he turned into the Roylance Arms, in the tap-room whereof were seated Bob Challoner and sundry boon companions, congenially occupied in the discussion of liquid refreshment and affairs local and public. Strangely enough, their con-

Nearer and nearer he dragged her to the margin of the pool.

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versation dropped as the inspector entered, and the party looked at each other in some amount of self-consciousness and confusion.

"Mornin~ Mr. Challoner," said Rossiter with unwonted suavity, "you'll take a mug of ale with me?"

Bob emptied his mug and expressed his willingness to repeat the operation with celerity.

"And perhaps your friends will join us?" said Rossiter, which suggestion also was adopted with unanimity.

"I want you to do me a favour, Challoner," said Rossiter. "I've a little terrier down at my digs, and I want to try him with a rat. Do you think you could get one for me, and do you think you could bring me one or two in a trap?"

"That I will, sir," said Bob, fired with visions of yet more ale. "Shall I leave 'em at your lodgings?"

"No," said the detective promptly, "I want you to bring them here."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Chum from "Down Under."

"Cooee!" Startled by the long piercing call Gerald Hastie removed his pipe from his lips, his feet from the mantelpiece, the rest of himself from the easy chair, laid down his book, and went to the window.

"It can't be!" he exclaimed. "And yet, whether it can or not, there's only one man in the world as long as that."

In a moment he was at the door, in another was gripping one of the biggest and cleverest hands that ever gripped the cane handle of a bat. This done, the nonchalance of the Anglo-Saxon race asserted itself. The stranger had come from the other end of the earth, but just as if he had dropped in from over the road, Hastie was saying, "Geoff!"

"Gerry!"

"Come in and sit down, old man. How goes it? Will you have some grub?"

"No thanks. If you've got some good beer."

In a few moments a college pot crested with a white foam was on the table, a big tobacco jar beside it.

"Now light up, and let's have the news, but before you start you'll let me put you up here, won't you?"

"Just for a night or two, Gerry," said the other, filling a big briarwood. "Of course, you guess I've come home to arrange matters for the team next year; got anything very good to meet us?"

"Well, yes, there's Jessop and Stoddy, he'll never grow stale, and there's Mac and Abel, and some new blood from the 'Varsities."

"And your old self as cat-like as ever."

"Well, old man, a man's got to be wide awake with a cornstalk like you who can straddle halfway down the pitch with one foot inside the crease."

"Well, you'll want your best. We're sending a hot lot from Australia. So much for what's bringing me home. Now I've come to Fallowfield to kill two birds with one stone, that is to look up two pals, your dear old self and a man I knew down under. Of course you know him, a chap named Roylance, made a big lump as a Colonial, came back to take up a family estate. One of the best, isn't he?"

"The fact is," said Gerald, "I can't say I know much about him, he rather fights shy of persons, but he seems all right, sits a horse well."

"Then he's learnt something. That's one thing he never could do in the bush, we used to guy him awfully for it."

"What!"

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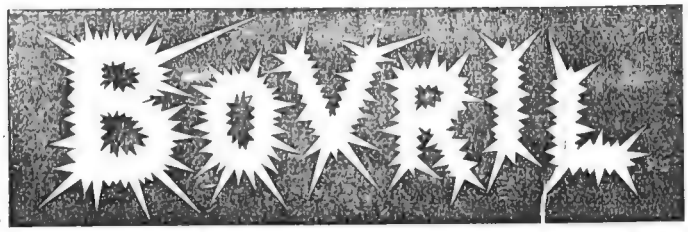

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"Well, never mind, he's one of the right sort for all that. I'm glad to hear he's got home all right because—well, I'm not superstitious or anything of that sort, but I had a bit of a dinner with Cyril the night before he sailed. He was as sober as I am now, but I never knew a chap so despondent. I'm not tiring you?"

"No; go on."

"He was frightfully pale, and when a fair man's pale, he is—well, he's pallid——"

"Fair! My dear chap, his hair is as black as your hat; blacker, that's brown."

"Gerry, my young friend, it strikes me the keenness of observation which used to spot a Proctor's bulldog at a mile in the old days has had the edge taken off it. But I was going to tell you. The night in question Cyril said to me: 'Geoff Heseltine, I'm going a long journey. I'm going back to the home I was born in, the home I left when I was a little kiddie.' 'And good luck to you,' says I, 'wish I were you. What are you sighing for?' For you'd have thought the poor chap was going to a funeral from the grizzling style of him. 'My dear old chap,' he went on, 'when I get back I shall feel like a stranger, a stranger in the house which belonged to my people for three hundred years, a stranger in the district. Do you know there's only one individual whose features I can call to mind, and that's a little girl with a face like one of the cherubs in Sir Joshua Reynold's picture; and bless my soul! she'll be by this time a grown-up young lady with her hair taken up and her frocks let down. Somehow I think I should know her, but I doubt if she'd know me.' 'Well,' says I chaffing, 'if she's grown up as nice as she was when she was little, tell her you've got an old pal who's just dying for a dear little English lady to take pity on him, for better or for worse.' 'Geoff, old man,' he said, 'somehow I've got an idea I shall never reach the old home and I shall never see the little girl.' 'What's the matter?' said I, and I filled his glass with champagne. But, Gerry, old fellow, something in the fellow's face, in his eyes, in his voice, took all the chaff out of me, and I felt for the moment as serious as he was. 'My lad,' said he, 'call it presentiment, premonition, second sight, clairvoyance, superstition; call it what you like, mark my words! I'm setting out for my home in England, I shall never reach that home, I shall never see that girl.' Well, of course, I laughed at the chap, as I shall laugh at him again before long, because it's all turned out skittles, anyway, as far as his reaching home is concerned; of course, I can't say whether he's seen the girl."

"Oh, yes," said Gerald Hastie, "he's seen the girl."

"Well, you're talking about as cheerfully as he was," said Geoffrey Heseltine. "Upon my word, I don't know whether it's the damp of the climate, but you home Britons, you are not boisterously hilarious."

"He's seen her, he's fallen madly in love with her, but he was too late, and he's in an awful temper about it."

"Hum! First thing I should think ever happened to put Cyril Roylance in a temper."

"Really? How different you and I estimate him!"

"Well, never mind about that, his presentimental rubbish has all turned out as I anticipated, in both particulars. So I've got to give him something back."

"Did you bet on it?"

"No; only he was so up to his eyes in his idea that he did this: He said, 'Geoff, old man, I haven't a relation in the world that I know about or care about, the only soul whose welcome I'm looking forward to is that little girl with the hair of spun sunshine and the eyes that bring bluebells to mind. Now, I'm so certain that something's going to happen to me, whether on sea or land, whether by rail or road, that I've made out this. It's a will Geoff, my last will and testament. Don't laugh, dear old chap, no, don't laugh at me. By that will I've given the English home that I know I shall never reach to the dear little girl whom I know I shall never see, and I place it in your hands to see at the proper time that it is carried out.'"

And Geoffrey Heseltine, taking from his breast pocket a document indorsed in German text and legal caligraphy, said: "There it is, old man, and I shall give it back to the dear old chap within a matter of hours. Read it for yourself, there's nothing private."

"He must have been thoroughly imbued with his presentiment, or whatever else we may call it," said Gerald after perusing the two closely written pages. "I say, Geoff, he must have thought a lot of you, judging from these half-dozen lines on page two."

"Oh, yes," said the other, "I shall lose a thumping legacy, and on my soul, Gerry, I shan't be sorry, for to tell you the truth, the dear old man was so earnest I caught half the infection of it, and it's quite a relief to me to know he's reached his English home after his long exile and his long, long journey. And now, after all this pow-wow, give us another pull of beer."

He took up the flagon, gazed at the old college arms, and then they fell to talking about the dear old days, when Plancus was Consul.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Squire Meets One who Knows Him—And One who Doesn't!

"Richard Seldon!"

They were standing face to face, and she called him by his name. He who had set out to seek her met her midway on her errand, which was to seek him, to plead with him, to command, if need be, that he should quit his evil ways. He tried to evade the challenge.

"Really!" he said. "There's some mistake. You are mistaking me for someone else; you know that everybody has a double."

"I know some men lead a double life. You are Richard Seldon—my husband."

He tried to smile, to treat the affair with levity, only something in her face paralysed the effort.

"Moreover," she said, "you are living the life of Richard Seldon, doing the work of Richard Seldon; it is you marauding this countryside, robbing, housebreaking—oh, God forgive you, Dick, murdering. I thought you dead; that was better than to know you as you are."

"Hush!" he said, with an evil look in his face that had made men call him Tiger Dick.

"Oh! you may threaten, you may strike me; it wouldn't be the first time, Dick, because you know you can be very cruel——"

"Cruel! If you attempt to give me away I'll twist your neck!"

"Very well, then," she said, "kill me if you like and have done with it. My life's hardly worth living with the weight of the knowledge of the life you're leading on it; kill me if you will."

The something better in his nature, tiger that he was, the consciousness that she stood before him, a defenceless, unresisting woman, yes, unresisting were he to clench those iron hands of his upon her neck, made him pause, in some measure ashamed. It had been his one weakness in the eyes of his desperate fraternity, that he, so terrible to the strong, had been so contemptuously indifferent towards the weak.

"Look here," he said, "Pollie, you let me go my way, I'll let you go yours."

"But where's your way leading, Richard?"

"What's that to you?"

"It's this to me. You and those with you have fastened the odium of your wicked deeds upon an innocent man; you may even bring that man, guiltless as

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he is, to the gallows, and he is very dear to one who is very dear to me—one who has been kind as a sister to me—whom I love and cherish as a sister."

Knowing whom she meant and that what she said was truth, the flames of jealous hate blazed up in his heart. Once more in a fury, and seizing her wrists, he said:

"Go your own way, I tell you. Leave me to mine. Baulk me, and by all that's sacred——"

"Oh, Dick! Dick! is there anything sacred to you? Don't swear by what is sacred with the blood of your fellow man upon your soul."

"I tell you," he exclaimed, hoarse with passion, "there's nothing I'll stop at if you try to baulk me."

"Dick Seldon," she said, "I know you for a remorseless man, daring and strong, but I tell you to do your very worst. I will not stand by and see you carry out your plan to send a guiltless man on to the scaffold that you may lead the girl who loves him to the altar of the God you have so grievously offended."

"Ha! ha! there you are!" he laughed sardonically. "It's your cursed woman's jealousy that's stirring you to make mischief. But you shan't—you shan't. I'm a desperate man playing a desperate game for desperate stakes, and there's no card in the pack too desperate for me to play. Why, curse you! do you think I'll let you stand in my path with your sanctified ways and your aggravating sanctimonious sermons. I tell you, what I have I'll hold against the world, and what I want I'll take, and the men or women who stand between me and what I want stand there at their peril."

"Dick! Dick!" she said, clasping his arms as he seized her and dragged her towards the deep pool beside the churchyard wall, "kill me if you like, but I will do this with my last breath—I'll pray for you; I'll do all I can, as I've done from the beginning, to lead you from your evil ways. Oh, Dick! there was a time you loved me, once on a time you said for my sake you'd try to turn your feet to other ways, to shake off the bonds of sin that held you."

Nearer and nearer he dragged her to the margin of the pool.

"Dick! Dick! don't you remember that day when I was quite a girl, when in the garden of my father's house you wooed me and won me, telling me I was the fairest rose of all. I told you then I would love you all my life. Dick! you're strong, even among strong men, and I'm but a weak woman. Throw me in that deep and silent water and let me drown, but then remember whenever you linger on the brink of crime, with my last breath I prayed to God for you."

He looked down at her face, remembered the hour and the garden that she spoke of, how the sun shone, not only in that garden, but in his very heart: how different he felt that day to whatever he had felt before or since. And all of a sudden his arms dropped to his sides, he bowed his head, a sob burst in his throat.

"Oh, Heaven!" he said, "why was I born?"

She was silent, knowing in that moment that even as the rod of Moses smote the rocks and the spring gushed forth, so on his heart a touch of something not of earth had wakened a latent spring.

She took his arm, away from the pool, away from one crime she led him.

"Dick! Dick!" she said, "compose yourself; pull yourself together. See, someone's coming."

They walked along, side by side. Mary bowed, and he raised his hat in response to the salutation of two men, the curate and another. They passed on.

Gerald Hastie was for the moment lost in a reverie. What was the meaning of that evidently confidential *tête-à-tête* between Cyril Roylance and Mary Morrison? Was it possible that his own love was unsuccessful because he had a rival—a rival with a broad domain and

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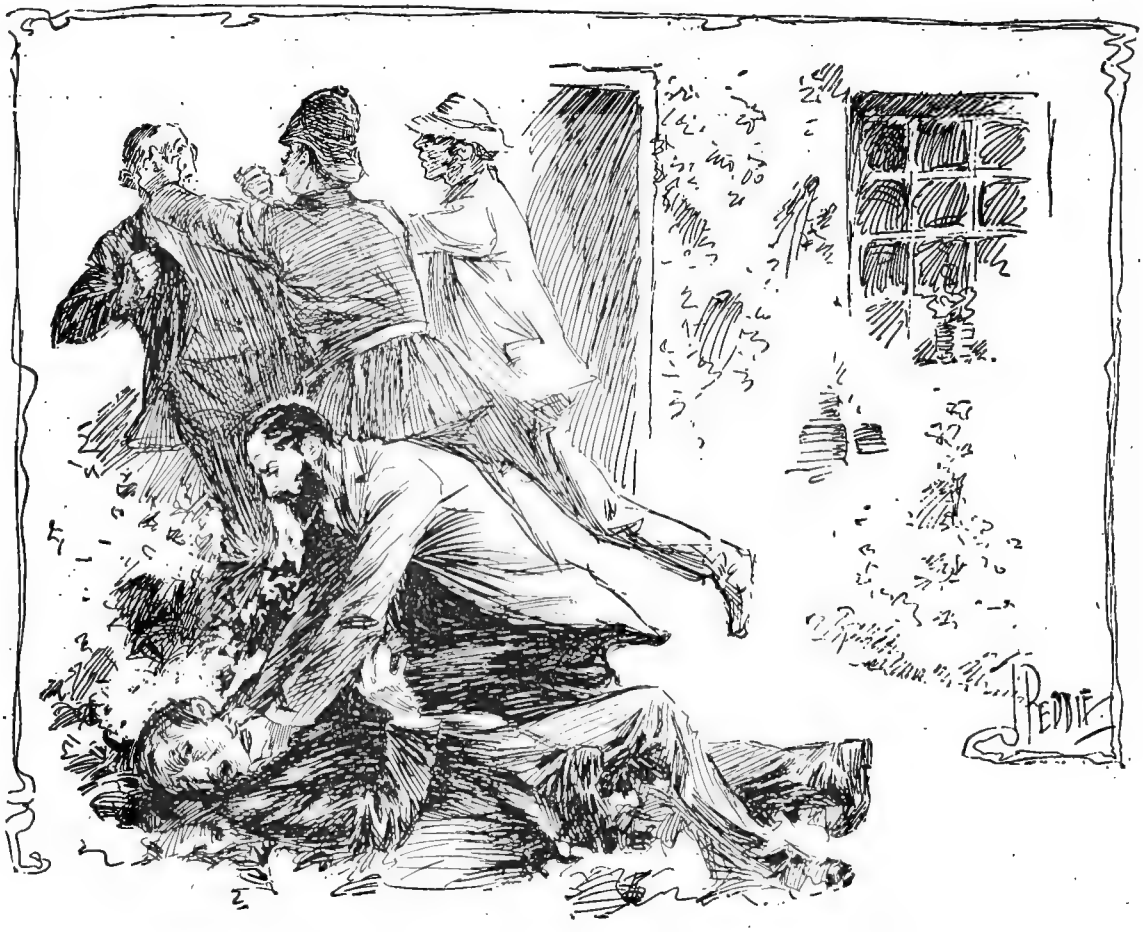

Kneeling on his captive's chest Rossiter shouted: "Bingle, seize the other."

a big rent roll? "No, no! she isn't like that," he said. "If she cares for him, she cares for him, not for his estate; besides, he's the Squire, the patron of her school, of course there are hundreds of matters for them to discuss." Then suddenly he roused himself from his dream, and turning to his companion, said:

"Dear, dear! I'd quite forgotten. Why, bless my soul! why didn't you speak to him?"

And the man from Australia repeated, "Speak to him? To whom?"

"The man who passed—your friend, Cyril Roylance, the master of Fallowfield Hall."

"Cyril Roylance! Why, man, I thought you were dreaming a minute ago, and now I'm sure. That's no more the Cyril Roylance from whom I parted less than six months ago in Sydney Harbour than it's you or I."

CHAPTER XXV.

A Wonderful Cure.

The scornful smile on the moist lips of Police-Constable Bingle occasioned by the appearance of the man from Scotland Yard, grew even broader as he observed what the man from Scotland Yard was carrying, and, affecting not to be aware of his approach, Mr. Bingle proceeded along the road, retraced his steps, returning to the garden wicket of the brothers Nubbley, to whom, as a matter of fact, some few minutes earlier he had been relating the substance of his conversation of the previous day with the man in question.

"Blowed if here he ain't a-comin'," he said behind the back of his hand. "And what d'ye think he's carryin'?"

The brothers exchanged glances.

"Don't you think, brother Joseph," said James, "I'd better take you indoors? It gets a bit chilly for you, brother Joseph, settin' still."

"No, don't go yet," pleaded Mr. Bingle; "do stop and listen to this. What do you think he's a-carryin'?"

"Don't know," laughed Joseph rather weakly. "I think, brother James, if you don't mind p'raps it would be wiser for me to go indoors. You see, when you've got chronic rheumatiz tying your legs up into sailor's knots after an accident, Mr. Bingle, you has to be careful."

"Yes, I quite understands, sir," said Mr. Bingle, "only if you'll let me prescribe for you I should advise

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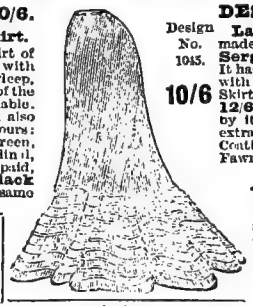

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you to take a nip out of that there bottle o' yours; just the right sort to keep away a chill, and blest if I ain't feelin' a little bit chilly round the small of the back."

Brother Joseph took the hint, also the suggested nip, and the square faced bottle was passed over the wicket to Mr. Bingle. And by this time Rossiter, who had quickened his footsteps, was alongside the garden wall.

"Morning, Mr. Rossiter," said Bingle, returning the square-faced bottle to Mr. James Nubbley and bestowing a wink of the deepest significance on both brothers.

"Good morning," replied Rossiter, with a cheerfulness which somewhat surprised the rural constable, having regard to the nature of their previous meeting. And he nodded genially to the brothers Nubbley.

"I suppose you don't happen to have seen anything of Branscombe or any of his gang?" Bingle inquired with another wink at the brothers.

"Wish I had," replied the detective with a sigh.

"Ah, we lots of us wishes for lots of things that don't come along lots of times," said Bingle. "But hello! I see you have made a capture of some sort at last," and he pointed to the cage carried by Rossiter, wherein half-a-dozen big buck rats were restlessly darting to and fro.

"Ah, yes," said Rossiter curiously, "I've got a little fox terrier at my place and I want to try him at a rat or two, and friend Bob here was good enough to get me these," and he nodded his head in the direction of Bob Challoner, who, with three or four companions, was loitering along towards them.

"And a werry good idea," said Bingle, delighted at the augmentation in the numbers of the audience whom he meant to regale by baiting the man from Scotland Yard. "I must say as 'ow I do admire the way you genelmen from London goes about your work, it's such a lesson to us chaw-bacons. You see when we sets about a job we goes tearing up and down the country all hours of the night arter our men, but you genelmen from Scotland Yard what's sent down here to take our work out of our 'ands, bless my soul! what do you do? When you're supposed to be getting on to the trail of one of the audaciousest gangs of criminals as was ever at large, why you settles yourself down to a nice little country holiday with a day or two's ratting in between."

"Well, you see, Bingle," said the other, when the laugh for which Mr. Bingle had been playing to the gallery had been duly awarded, "you see we all have our different ways of working; you've yours, I've mine. Bless my soul! How clumsy I am," for as he spoke he let fall his pipe over the wicket into the cottage garden.

"Well," chuckled Bingle, with another glance at the gallery, "I ain't going to be so unpolite as to contradict yer."

And in the midst of a second meed of merriment at his expense, Rossiter, disregarding Mr. James Nubbley's "Don't trouble, sir, allow me," lifted the latch of the wicket and was inside the garden stooping for his pipe. He picked it up and replaced it in his pocket.

"Well, anyway, Mr. Bingle," he said in a somewhat appealing tone, "after all, there is a bit of sport in seeing a smart dog setting about a good strong rat or two, and these look strong enough, don't they, Mr. James?"

"Very strong," said brother James admiringly.

"Yes, they're all right, aren't they, Mr. Joseph?" and he held them up to the inspection of the brother in the invalid chair.

"They're very fine rats," said brother Joseph, moving his face aside, "if you don't mind, Mr. Rossiter, not too close. I can't abear the sight of rats, and I ain't over partial to the smell of 'em."

"But these are beauties," said the detective, holding them directly over the invalid chair, "and did you ever see such a clever cage as this?"

"Yes, very simple, but do be careful with it," for the detective was handling that cage in a most imprudent manner.

"You know, the cleverest things always are simple," he said. "Look here, you just twist this handle and you slip back this catch, and the door swings right back as easy as—hullo! look out—why, blest if it ain't slipped back now—look out—look out!" for even as he spoke and fumbled with the bars the door of the cage which he was holding end up swung back and half-a-dozen big buck rats flopped down in a shower on to the occupant of that invalid chair.

"Help—help—murder!" shouted brother Joseph as the fat rats flopped upon him, some outside, some inside the apron.

And in a paroxysm of terror and repulsion he flung back the apron of that invalid chair, out of which he jumped with the agility of an acrobat.

"By Jove!" shouted Rossiter. "What price rats for curing rheumatism! And they've done something else, my friend, they've disarranged your whiskers," and with a grab at the white flowing, silver-haired frame of brother Joseph's face, he snatched it bodily away. In another moment his hands were on the man's throat and the man was on the ground on his back. Kneeling on his captive's chest, Rossiter shouted: "Bingle, seize the other," for brother James, after gazing for a moment, staggered and speechless at what had been going on, had turned and was looking wildly round to choose which way he should make a bolt for it.

"Seize him, I tell you!" shouted Rossiter. "Let him go and that tunic's off your back before the day is out!"

Meantime, Bob Challoner, vaulting the wall, had collared brother James.

"You've gotten to stop, measter. Ah! Mr. Rossiter's after trapping more than rats. I've got him sir," and by this time Bingle, recovering from his stupefaction, had rushed through the gate and laid his hand, too, upon the man.

"Mind, you'll be responsible Mr. Rossiter!" he said, failing even now to understand.

But a fierce swift blow, flush in the face, from brother James, paradoxically half-stunned and quite awakened him.

"That's your game, be it! Hold on to him, Bob! I've got him," and in a moment he had twisted the other's wrist and forced his arm behind his back. "Now lads," he shouted, "help up along with 'em to the lock-up. Ah, Mr. Rossiter, I thowt you an' I 'ud get hold of summat or somebody with this job, between us."

"Mind what you're doin'," gurgled brother Joseph, and Detective-Inspector Rossiter said sternly:

"I know what I'm doing, I take all responsibility. I arrest you, Joshua Branner and Barnaby Plumb, on the charge of wilful murder of John William Barker. I warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you, and I call on all civilians here to assist me in arresting these men in the name of the King."

(To be concluded.)

Fair Cyclist: "Where do these roads lead to?" Native: "One on 'em leads to my 'ome, an' t'other goes straight on."

Teacher (suspiciously): "Who wrote your composition, Johnny?" Johnny: "My father." Teacher: "What, all of it?" Johnny: "No'm; I helped him."

Jack: "Why do they give all these dishes French names? By their common English names they'd taste as sweet." Tom: "Yes; but they wouldn't cost as much."

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CATARRH OF THE NOSE AND THROAT IN RELATION TO DEAFNESS.

In considering catarrh of the nose and throat as a cause of deafness, let us first fix in our mind some important facts as to the structure, the functions, and the anatomical relations of the Eustachian tube. This tube is a fibrous canal which connects the nose and throat most intimately with the cavity of the middle ear. It has a lining of delicate membrane, which is continuous at one end with the mucous membrane of the ear, and at the other with the membranous lining of the nasal cavities and of the throat. Any inflammation, therefore, of the nose and throat has at once a direct way open to affect the hearing, by extending along the membrane of the Eustachian tube into the middle ear.

The physiological function of the Eustachian tube is also affected by catarrh of the posterior portion of the nasal cavities and of the upper part of the throat. In its normal condition this tube permits air to penetrate to the middle ear, and thus preserves an equilibrium between the pressure of the external air and that contained within the aural cavity. When there is swelling of the membrane around the opening of the Eustachian tube the opening of the canal is closed, thus preventing the air from penetrating to the middle ear. The external air pressure then becomes greater than that of the cavity of the middle ear, with the result that the ear drum is forced inward, interfering with the movements of the minute chain of bones, so essential for conveying sounds to the nerve of hearing. Should this condition of the Eustachian tube continue, an obstinate form of deafness results from adhesions, which bind down the chain of bones and the tympanic membrane, or drumhead, so firmly that their response to the vibrations of waves of sound becomes very feeble, and even impossible in very chronic cases.

A still more complete description of deafness in its relation to catarrh and various other causes will be found in the "Journal for the Deaf," which can be obtained free of charge on application by post to the Editor, 72, Regent's Park-road, London, N.W. The "Journal for the Deaf" also contains an account of a large number of cases of Deafness cured by the Drouet Treatment. The success of this new system, although already widely known, gathers still greater fame from the reports of cures recorded during the past month. From the October records the following are selected as illustrations for this brief treatise on deafness complicated by catarrh:

It would be difficult to find a more obstinate and complicated case of deafness than that described on the Patient's Report Form forwarded to the Drouet Institute by Mr. A. Adams, 22 years of age, of Westbourne-square, London, W. The deafness, in this case, was so great that the ticking of a watch could not be heard, unless pressed close to the ears. There were continuous noises in the head, occasional aching in the ears, and constant discharge. The discharge began when the patient was eight years old, and followed as a result of scarlet fever. Later the deafness was further increased, as a result of catarrhal complications. Mr. Adams had, at several times, tried treatment for the ear trouble, consulting no less than eight doctors, but without beneficial results. On July 7, of this year, Mr. Adams began the treatment prescribed by the Drouet Institute's Consulting Physician, and, as a result of faithfully pursuing the treatment, was able to report a complete cure as follows:

15, Delamere-crescent, Westbourne Square, W., Oct. 29, 1901.

I should have sent my final report before, but thought I would wait and see if the ears still kept well. I am glad to say they have, and I now can hear a watch tick at arm's length in both ears, and the discharge has entirely stopped.—Yours faithfully,

A. F. ADAMS.

A second report, a week later, is still more interesting:

15, Delamere-crescent, Nov. 6, 1901.

I wish to write and tell you that I am quite cured of my deafness, and also noises in the head, and that the discharge is quite stopped. I feel quite another person now, as I always felt miserable before. I went to five or six different doctors and hospitals, and they did not do me any good. Had a bad ear since I was eight years old. I then went to Toronto, Canada, and also went to two doctors there, but they did not do me any good; but am glad to say that I am cured now by using your treatment, and shall send anybody to you that I know is suffering.—I remain, yours very sincerely,

A. F. ADAMS.

The case of Miss Jane Macdonald, of Glasgow, will be of the greatest interest to those afflicted by catarrh of the nose and throat. In this case the ailment was attributed to having taken a chill, a cause which produces the majority of catarrhal troubles. There were the usual symptoms of discharges from the nose and throat, sneezing, a thick, swollen feeling in the throat, and great difficulty in breathing through the nose. The local doctor, whom she consulted, told her that the obstruction to breathing was caused by a catarrhal inflammation of the membrane inside the nose, of so severe a character that the sides of the nasal cavities touched each other, and thus left no passage. Previous treatment having failed to cure her, after two years of suffering, she decided to place her case in charge of the Consulting Physician, who prescribed the appropriate Drouet treatment by correspondence. Miss Macdonald's first course of medicines was forwarded to her early in September, and, after following out the physician's instructions several weeks, she reported herself completely cured as follows:

4, Leckethill-street, Springburn, Glasgow. Oct. 21, 1901

Dear Sir—I have discontinued the use of your medicines for a week now, and I am happy to say that I am perfectly satisfied with my condition, and my nose and throat are now perfectly well.—Yours faithfully,

JANE MACDONALD.

The original letter, with all the others of which extracts have been given above, may be seen at the Autograph Room of the Drouet Institute, where hundreds of letters emanating from grateful patients are kept. The Autograph Room is open to the public every day, except Sunday, from ten a.m. to six p.m.

A special feature of the Drouet treatment is that patients who cannot come to London to be examined are enabled to receive advice by filling up a pathological report form, which allows them to state explicitly their case. This form may be had, free of charge, with a copy of the "Journal for the Deaf," by writing to the Editor, Drouet Institute, 72, Regent's Park-road, N.W. In fact, all the persons whose cures have just been reported were treated by means of the pathological form, and never saw the Consulting Physician who prescribed for them.

It is, however, always advisable when possible to be personally examined at the Drouet Institute, 72, Regent's Park-road, London, N.W., where consultations are held daily, except Sunday, from two to four in the afternoon. Special consultations may also be had at any time by previous arrangement. For all personal consultations a fee is charged. Any advice by correspondence is absolutely free, as are also the consultations given by means of the report form.

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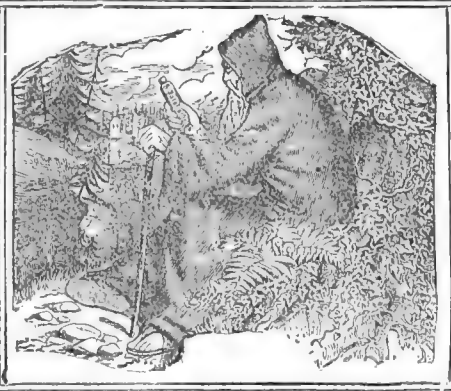

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A Way of its Own.

TOURIST: "Fine morning, Sandy. What's the day going to be?" Sandy: "Well, I'm thinking it'll may be rain." Tourist: "But the barometer is rising, Sandy." Sandy: "Aye, but it's verra little heed the weather hereabouts pays to the barometer."

Consolation for a Sweetheart.

"DON'T cry so bitterly, darling," said the policeman to the weeping fair one. "I can't help it." A tender heart beat under his blue coat, and he murmured: "Even though I'm removed to another beat, sweetest, fortune, I trust, will be kind to me; so wipe away your tears. I will meet another cook, and I will remember to love her, if only for your sake."

A Life Ill-Spent.

"AH, yes. his was a wasted life," sighed the bald-headed gentleman. "How?" inquired a friend, "was he dissipated? Had he antipathy for work? Was he a gambler, a lover of fast horses, a——?" "Nay! Nay!" interrupted the bald-headed gentleman. "None of these, but worse, far worse: he spent his life endeavouring to raise vegetables which should remotely resemble the gorgeous specimens he had seen in the seedsman's catalogues."

Not Realism.

YOUNG AUTHOR: "Would you call my novel realism or romance?" Friend: "What does the heroine say when she accepts the hero?" Young Author: "Oh, she says, 'Yes, dear George, we will tread life's path together, one in heart and purpose, bearing each other's burdens, sharing each other's grief, doubling each——'" Friend: "Oh, that's romance of the first water. A real girl would no more think of making a speech on such an occasion than of singing a song, or dancing the Highland fling."

Seeking Information.

A NUMBER of well-disposed and wealthy residents of the West-end of London started some classes for the purpose of giving instruction in science to their less fortunate fellows who lived in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel. One evening quite a small crowd came together to hear a discourse on "Air," which was to be delivered by a gentleman who had the misfortune to be extremely bald-headed. The lecturer was furnished with a good supply of interesting diagrams, with which he used every means to make his address instructive. In fact, he soon flattered himself that he had thoroughly succeeded, for even the youngsters seemed to pay great attention to what he had to say. When his peroration was in full swing, he remarked: "It is quite impossible for any person to live without air." The lecturer's collapse was, however, very speedy, when a sharp-witted urchin shouted: "'Ow about yerself, guv'ner?"

How a Tragedy was Avoided.

"YOU had a row with Grisby to-day, I understand." "Not much of a row, fortunately." "How did it occur?" "Why, he called me a stockbroker, a swindler, and numerous other disagreeable names." "What did you say?" "I told him that for twopence I would horsewhip him." "Did he give you the money?" "No; he had nothing but two penny stamps, and I never take stamps."

To Their Mutual Benefit.

"YOUR little girl is sickening for the measles; please fetch her away at once," was the distressing news sent by the mistress of a West Riding board school to the wife of a working man, whose child showed unmistakable signs of illness. Soon after, the mother strolled leisurely into the school-porch, wiping a pair of soap-smeared hands on the edge of a discoloured apron. "Poor little lassie!" she said, kissing the ailing child on both cheeks. "She's looked bad for three days, but I didn't want to have her at home sooner than I could help, 'cos her cot's very handy for foldin' clothes on, and the oftener the doctor comes to her the more washin' I'll have to take in to pay him. But I knew you wouldn't be too keen on sendin' her back, marm," she went on gratefully, addressing the mistress. "If only a few more of the children can manage to catch the measles, the school will have to be shut up right away, and think what a long Christmas holiday you lucky teachers will get."

A Cabby's Dodge.

SHE was an American, and alighted from the Continental mail at Charing Cross. To a deeply interested hansom-driver, the last arrived girl from Chicago put the question: "Say, hackman, can you get me through to the Hotel Cecil under half-an-hour? My friends will be waiting for me there after half-past six." "Well, miss," replied the guileless cabby, "it's a fairish long drive, but I'll do it all right." Whereupon he lashed up his horse, and proceeded at a break-neck pace down Whitehall, then back along the Embankment, finally bringing up within the stipulated time his over-driven steed, with heaving flanks, at the entrance of that great caravanserai so favoured by our American cousins. "Oh, janitor," said the lady, as she, after her luggage being removed, swept through the portals of the "Cecil," "please pay the hackman; he has driven me such a long way, and at such a pace, too. Look at his poor horse." "Where have you come from, cabby?" said the porter. "What, Charing Cross only? Here you are then—fare and two trunks, one-and-four." The hansom-driver slowly drove away.

"The Baby."
(From *Domestic Ditties.*)

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The Grand Christmas Double Number will be ready next week. Price 2d.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

The next issue of *Short Stories* will be the Grand Christmas Double Number. It will consist of 64 pages crammed full of bright stories and competitions, and in addition will contain the opening chapters of a splendid new serial, entitled "The Lovers of Yvonne," by Rafael Sabatini, whose stories are well known to readers of *Pearson's Magazine*. In this issue will appear the first set of Brain Gymnasium Puzzles, which feature will take the place of the Editor's Page during the winter months. Readers are invited to send in puzzles suitable for insertion on condition that they do not compete the week they appear. Pencil-cases will be sent to all those readers whose puzzles are used. Don't forget to order your copy of the Christmas number at once; the price is only twopence, and there will be a big demand for the issue.

Two correct claims have been received this week in connection with the Photo Competition. The names of the winners are:

Dr. W. G. Grace (No. 42),
St. Andrews,
Laurie Park Road,
Sydenham, S.E.

Mr. F. W. Adams (No. 44),
Chief Officer, Fire Department,
2 Church End Villas,
Hendon, N.W.

This now brings the total number of winners up to nineteen, so that altogether we have paid away £95. Five more portraits appear this week on page 751, and the correct claimant of each one will receive a £5 note.

The following is a complete list of previous winners: Mr. Henry R. Pead (No. 2), 58 Newington Green, N.; Mr. R. H. Robinson (No. 4), Post Office, Queen's Square, Bowness-on-Windermere; Mr. H. Bramwell (No. 6), 50 Gordon Buildings, Batchelor Place, Church Street, Camberwell, S.E.; Mr. F. D. Strange (No. 8), Calne, Wilts; Mr. William Maher (No. 9), 22 Tangier Lane, Eton, Bucks; Mr. P. Insall (No. 13), 4 The Parade, Acton Green, W.; Mrs. Blake (No. 14), 49 Rupert Street, Reading; Mr. John Holland (No. 16), 57 Richard Street, Cilfynydd, near Pontypridd, Wales; Mr. W. J. Williams (No. 17), 1a Obelisk Buildings, Lewisham, S.E.; Mrs. W. Cook (No. 19), Axholme Cottage, Cross Street, Crowle, Lincs; Mr. James Thomas (No. 20), 6 Baxter Terrace, Glyncorrw, Cymmer, Glamorganshire; Mr. Stanton Wright (No. 21), 1a Hilton Villas, Champion Crescent, Sydenham, S.E.; Mr. James Cates (No. 23), 28 Esplanade, Scarborough; Mrs. Crask (No. 26), 27 Maidstone Road, Lowestoft; Mr. Geo. R. Sims (No. 28), 12 Clarence Terrace, Regent's Park, London, N.W.; Mr. D. E. Jones (No. 36), 69 Beechfield Street, Mountpottinger, Belfast; Mr. J. G. Adams (No. 40), 24 Broadway, Kettering.

I would ask my correspondent who signs himself "An Old Reader, of Hackney, N.E." (he carefully omits his name and address—for fear of a visit from the Fighting Editor, doubtless), to refer to any of the winners in the Photo Competition—all of whose names and addresses are on this page—as to its genuineness. I am sure they would all be only too glad to prove to him that they have received the £5 as promised. My correspondent says he has been a reader of *Short Stories* for a good many years, which makes me all the more surprised that he should imagine for a moment that any of the competitions are not genuine. The kindest construction I can put on this letter is that a virulent attack of "sour grapes" has prompted its sending—the writer of it saying that his attempts in competitions have never been successful.

Will "C. J. McM.," of Belfast, please read the reply to "J. C. K.," published on this page in the issue dated November 23rd.

Any attempts sent in for the Storyette Competition in envelopes are disqualified. Humorous stories which are too long to be written on a postcard are quite unsuitable for insertion.

Advice to Readers on Various Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

The matrimonially inclined will doubtless be interested in a problem which has been sent for my solution by a young lady who signs herself "Arnish," and about which she is apparently deeply concerned. If a girl has two lovers, whom we will call for convenience X and Y, and supposing the one she likes best is not the one who likes her best, what ought she to do? X is madly in love with her, and she would be madly in love with X "were t'other dear charmer away." As it is, she won't marry X because of Y, and she can't marry Y because he won't ask her to, and is so wrapped up in the study of metaphysics that he is absolutely impenetrable to hints.

The position is certainly an awkward one, but it seems to me that there is only one way out of it. The girl ought to marry X. Waiting for Y in the hope that he may realise what he is missing seems to be making a lottery of the thing, and lotteries, as we all know, are wrong.

"W. S." wants to know why it is that the weight of precious metals is always spoken of in ounces.

It has always been customary, right away from the very early days, to describe precious metals by weight in ounces. It dates from the first stage of mining. Silver and gold are found in very small quantities, and as fast as they are found a weight is given to them. If this practice were not followed, and miners waited till sufficient metal was found to call it pounds, mining operations would soon get into a hopeless muddle. Gold in bars and silver in ingots are always weighed and sold in ounces—they are precious metals. When they are minted the nomenclature is changed into grains.

"R. C. D." and his friend are in a dilemma. They both love the same girl, and she shows the same affection for them both. They don't wish to quarrel over the matter, and would be glad to know what they can do.

Why not toss up which shall go first and ask her to be his wife? If she cares more for the other one, she can easily refuse the first; and if, on the other hand, she prefers the first-comer, she can just as easily say so. Perhaps she does not care for either of you in that way.

"Studentina." — An average Englishman is supposed to consume annually the produce of rather more than three and one-eighth acres of land. Half-an-acre for bread, two and a half for animal food, one-eighth for beer, cider, etc., one-fiftieth for vegetables, and an equally small proportion for luxuries.

The Fountain Pen this week has been awarded to Mr. William Silcocks, 42 West Street, Trowbridge, Wilts.

Printed by Horace Cox, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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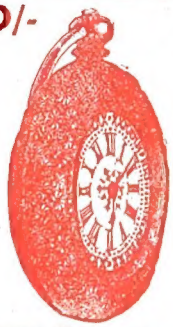

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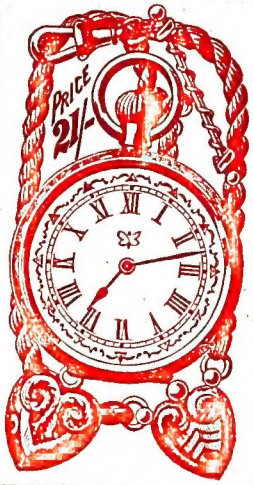

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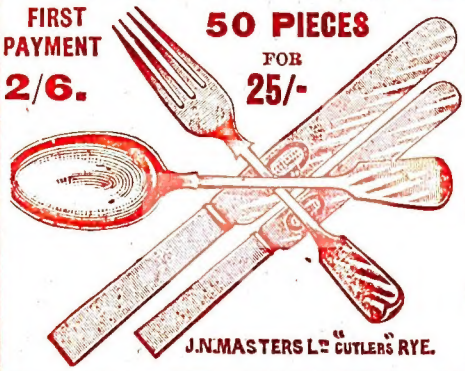

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